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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

ENGLAND...Bolton Wanderers' Darren Pratley says a prayer for team-mate Fabrice Muamba who collapsed after suffering a cardiac arrest during an FA Cup quarter-final tie at White Hart Lane against Tottenham Hotspur

AUSTRALIA...Jeremy Brockie (left) and Michael Bridges in action for Newcastle Jets against Bribane Roar

CANADA...Los Angeles Galaxy's David Beckham removes streamers as he prepares to take a corner against Toronto in the CONCACAF Champions League

NEPAL...North Korea's Jong Il-gwan is tackled by Davronjon Ergashev of Tajikistan during an AFC Challenge Cup match

PERU...Jose Carlos Fernandez celebrates his goal for Alianza Lima against Nacional in the Libertadores Cup

HOLLAND...NAC's Robbert Schilder argues with PSV players after he is sent off in the Dutch league match

GERMANY...Borussia Dortmund celebrate a home win against Werder Bremen in front of their famous Sudtribune

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

To see more of the best photos from the month, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the images by logging on to bit.ly/zOMWBT

FROM THE EDITOR

As this month's *World Soccer* went to press, FIFA was announcing plans for reform and Sepp Blatter was continuing with his quest to re-invent himself as an anti-corruption stalwart, as if the past decades of sleaze had not happened on his watch.

In this issue, we report (page 34) on the rise and fall of Ricardo Teixeira, a man who should have been one of the most powerful figures in the world game leading up to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Instead, in the best tradition of politicians caught with their hands in the till, he is stepping down to spend more time with his family.

> In the best tradition of politicians caught with their hand in the till, Teixeira is stepping down to spend more time with his family

Yet as Steve Menary reports (page 12), there is still plenty of work needed to clean up football at the coalface.

On a brighter note, I hope you enjoy the free booklet on the European Championship. Next month, the next chapter in the history of the competition takes shape as we publish a special edition of *World Soccer*, with our comprehensive guide to all 16 Euro 2012 teams. Please look out for it.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1. Ricardo Teixeira quit as president of the Brazilian federation and member of the FIFA ExCo ..... Page 34
2. Premier League chairman Dave Richards forced to apologise after accusing FIFA and UEFA of "stealing" the game ..... Page 13
3. Claudio Ranieri sacked as coach of Internazionale ..... Page 38
4. FIFA prepared to receive the recommendations of anti-corruption expert Mark Pieth ..... Page 75
5. Anzhi defender Christopher Samba caught up in a row over racism ..... Page 40
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7. The new Brazilian championship prepares for kick-off ..... Page 86
8. Leading European clubs strike a deal with UEFA and FIFA over player compensation ..... Page 74
9. Record crowds saw new MLS season begin in Canada ..... Page 44
10. USA crashed out of the London 2012 Olympic qualifiers ..... Page 90

BRAZIL

Joao Havelange hospitalised

Not well...Havelange

Former FIFA president Joao Havelange was in a critical condition with a viral infection in a Rio de Janeiro hospital as speculation mounted over whether FIFA would publish a report into bribery involving FIFA's former marketing partner ISL.

The 95-year-old Brazilian was president of the world governing body from 1974 until 1998, but stepped down from his position on the International Olympic Committee at the end of last year, two days before he was due to face an ethics investigation.

Havelange was reported to have been named as one of the FIFA officials who had taken bribes from ISL, along with his former son-in-law Ricardo Teixeira, who quit all his football positions in March (see report, page 34).

Anti-corruption expert Mark Pieth has called for the publication of a court file which named the alleged recipients of the ISL bribes, but FIFA president Sepp Blatter refused to do so on the grounds that it would contravene Swiss law.

Blatter had promised that FIFA would publish the ISL file by last December but two anonymous objectors – reported to be Havelange and Teixeira – successfully applied to the Swiss supreme court to prevent publication.

"Everyone thinks he's always out with girls or at the wheel of a Ferrari. The reality is that he spends more time with his PlayStation"

Cristina Balotelli, the sister of Manchester City striker Mario, has a stab at changing her brother's wild image

GREECE

Athens derby abandoned after crowd trouble

Flashpoint...police try to keep fans at bay

Panathinaikos' home game against Olympiakos at the Olympic Stadium in Athens had to be abandoned in the 83rd minute after Pana fans rioted.

Olympiakos, whose supporters had been banned in a bid to prevent trouble, were winning 1-0 with a 51st-minute goal by French-born Algeria midfielder Djamel Abdoun.

At half-time, dozens of fans attacked police, with reports of 57 supporters being rounded up and six arrested for possessing firebombs. Four police officers were injured, two seriously.

The second half was delayed by 50 minutes, but fighting continued outside the stadium as a number of ticketless fans tried to storm into the stadium, forcing police to use tear gas.

Firebombs, broken plastic chairs, plexiglass and fire extinguishers were thrown, and fire crews were called to extinguish seats set ablaze.

BRAZIL

Two killed as fans clash in Sao Paulo

Two Palmeiras fans died following violent clashes with Corinthians supporters at a Sao Paulo state championship game.

A 21-year-old Palmeiras supporter, Andre Alves, died after being shot in the head in the confrontation between Palmeiras' Mancha Verde gans and Gavioes da Fiel from Corinthians.

A second fan was declared brain dead two days later after failing to recover from head injuries sustained in the fighting.

HEROES & VILLAINS

DIONISIS CHIOTIS

APOEL Nicosia's goalkeeper saved two spot-kicks in the penalty shoot-out against Lyon to book his club a place in the Champions League quarter-finals. It was the first time in the history of European club football that a Cypriot team had reached the last eight of any tournament.

History maker...Chiotis

THIERRY HENRY

He travelled from New York to London and back again in a fleeting visit to see his one-time Arsenal team-mate Fabrice Muamba in hospital following the Bolton Wanderers player's cardiac arrest against Tottenham Hotspur.

GUDNI BERGSSON

Now a lawyer, the former Tottenham Hotspur and Iceland defender jumped in to protect a colleague who was attacked by a man with a knife in Reykjavik.

MARIO GOMEZ

Scored eight goals in three games, including two hat-tricks (making it five for the season), as Bayern Munich racked up 20 goals. A 7-1 win against Hoffenheim and 6-0 against Hertha Berlin in the Bundesliga were either side of a 7-0 win against Basle in the Champions League.

Goal machine...Gomez

DAVE RICHARDS

The Premier League chairman accused FIFA and UEFA of stealing football from England at a conference in Qatar – and then fell into a pool at the hotel.

SERGIO RAMOS

Set a club record by accumulating his 11th red card in the Spanish league during the 1-1 draw away to Villarreal. His dismissals have come in 221 La Liga appearances, in just under seven years.

Unwanted record...Ramos

JASMIN FEJZIC

With just seconds to go until penalties in their German Cup semi-final against Borussia Dortmund, second-tier Greuther Furth bought on reserve goalkeeper Fejzic, who had shone in training by saving spot-kicks. However, the game ended moments later when he scored an own goal.

Unhappy ending...Fejzic

NENAD SAVIC

A Swiss title winner with Basle in 2002, the 31-year-old was given a three-year prison sentence for dealing cocaine.

"I couldn't play in an exhibition game now. I can't run. There was a point not long ago when I almost couldn't walk"

Former Argentina striker Gabriel Batistuta reveals the price he has paid for his career

PORTUGAL

Brazilian 'Mr Average' fuels Braga's surprise title challenge

If those provincial upstarts at Braga are making such a sustained tilt at their first-ever Portuguese league title, piecing together a remarkable sequence of wins from December through March, much of the credit must go to their Brazilian striker Lima. The 28-year-old's exceptional strength in one-on-one duels, coupled with his low centre of gravity, speed, sneaky movement off the ball and explosive right foot, has turned him into the most in-form goalgetter in Portugal this season.

His best friend in football, compatriot and Gil Vicente centre-back Claudio, may describe him as "an exceptional man, though insecure", but Claudio must know something we don't. In the course of this season, Lima – who is from the southern Brazilian state of Parana – has not betrayed the slightest hint of apprehension or lack of confidence. From open play or set-pieces, he has been the epitome of the sharp-shooting front man, not only being in with a great chance of ending the campaign as the Portuguese league's number one goalscorer but also on target four times in the Europa League.

And not for Lima the fast-track bully modus operandi of only piling on the goals against the lesser lights, either. This season he has been rampant against minnows and the domestic "big three" alike, and it says everything about his state of grace that despite knowing exactly how he likes to operate - generally running into space to latch on to cute passes from the likes of fellow Brazilians Alan and Mossoro - defenders still cannot shut him down.

Boot-iful...Braga team-mate's show their appreciation of Lima's talents

Very much on course to become Braga's best single-season goalscorer of all-time (the current record belongs to the Angolan, Chico Gordo, who hit 21 in 1977-78), Lima's current petal-strewn path stands in marked comparison to his first taste of the Portuguese game eight years ago. Snapped up in 2003 by third division Vizela, the 20-year-old Lima suffered terribly with homesickness and within a year he had gone home to Brazil, where apart from a few flashes of success – appearances in the Libertadores Cup with Parana and Santos - he generally was perceived as an itinerant "Mr Average", busking from club to club.

Deadly...Lima strikes again, beating Academica goalkeeper Romuald Peiser

Unexpected runners-up

The turning point of Lima's career would come in 2009 when Portuguese top-flight side Belenenses recruited him from Brazilian outfit Avai – and this time he did not flop. He impressed sufficiently to warrant a switch one year later to Braga, where he helped the club to a most unexpected runners-up spot in last season's Europa League.

"During his first spell in Portugal, with Vizela, he was not at all lacking in ability," reflects Claudio. "He already had that very strong shot of his, and his movement was great.

"But you have to say that on turning up to play for Belenenses, he was another player completely. He had filled out physically and played with a lot more intensity. He was the finished article and it was only a matter of time before he went into orbit."

So, could Lima one day take the naturalisation route and represent Portugal? His uncle, Coronel Nunes, the president of the Parana state football association in Brazil, certainly thinks it possible. "I'd love to see it happen," he says. "In my opinion he could be another Deco."

Nick Bidwell

"I tried everything in order for us not to wear our black kit against Arsenal. But the only alternative was to play nude. We won't wear it again"

Milan director Adriano Galliani on his club's third-choice black strip, which the team have worn three times this season, losing on all three occasions

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 ISMAEL MATAR, UAE v Lebanon
An unstoppable free-kick, struck from 30 yards into the far top corner.

2 MIROSLAV STOCH, Fenerbahce v Genclerbirligi
Sweetly struck right-foot volley from 20 yards, following a Fenerbahce corner.

3 HEVERTON, Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma v Nagoya Grampus Eight
Two overhead kicks; the first by Everton Santos sets up the second, which is finished by Heverton.

4 OSCAR DE MARCOS, Athletic Bilbao v Manchester United
A distinct hint of offside, maybe, but a finely worked team goal, notable for the flicked assist by Anders Herrera.

5 LIONEL MESSI, Barcelona v Sevilla
Plays a one-two before nut-megging the last defender and chipping the ball over the advancing goalkeeper.

6 PETER CROUCH, Stoke City v Manchester City
A good first touch is followed up with a spectacular volley on the turn.

GOALS WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN
To see video footage of these goals, and many more we've selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to bit.ly/GX95Dn

WINNERS

KILMARNOCK
Won the Scottish League Cup for the first time in their history, and their first trophy for 15 years, after beating Celtic 1-0 in the Final.

QUEVILLY & GAZELEC AJACCIO
Two clubs from the third division reached the French Cup semi-finals.

TORONTO
The Canadians knocked MLS champions Los Angeles Galaxy out of the CONCACAF Champions League quarter-finals.

LOSERS

CHANNEL FIVE
Man City and Man United's Europa League exits were a blow for the TV station's hopes of screening their games in Britain.

USA UNDER-23s
The United States missed out on the men's 2012 Olympic football tournament in London this summer after a 3-3 draw with El Salvador.

JACOB MELLIS
Chelsea's 21-year-old midfielder was sacked after he set off a smoke grenade at the Premier League club's training ground.

"If Pele thinks he's the Beethoven of football then I'm Ronnie Wood, Keith Richards and the Bono of football, because I have so much passion"

Diego Maradona (right) has another pop at his Brazilian rival

ANGUILLA

Caribbean Union hit by fresh controversy

Attempts to reform the Caribbean Football Union (CFU) have been hit by a fresh governance scandal involving Damien Hughes, the CFU's acting secretary-general from Anguilla.

Hughes is also secretary-general of the Anguilla Football Association (AFA), where half the senior male clubs claim they are unable to vote in association affairs and have not seen proper financial accounts since 2009.

"The 2010 accounts were presented at an extraordinary general meeting of the AFA held on Friday, January 27, 2012," say the disenfranchised clubs. "However, because of the generalised nature of the financial report, the clubs present requested and were promised a detailed breakdown of the report."

When it did not materialise, the clubs approached the sports minister, Edison Baird, who called in Hughes and AFA president Raymond Guishard. After the meeting, Baird gave Hughes and Guishard – who was banned for 45 days in the cash-for-votes scandal that brought down the old CFU administration – a week to put their verbal answers down in writing.

This deadline was not met and Baird now plans to take the matter further.

FIFA typically suspends members subject to political interference, but Baird was acting on behalf of both the government and three clubs: Kicks United, Strikers and Doc's United.

Since joining FIFA in 1996, the AFA has received millions of dollars through FIFA's financial assistance programme (FAP) and the GOAL scheme. Anguilla, a British colony, have played just 25 senior internationals in that time.

"We are concerned that not enough football is being played in Anguilla," say the rebel clubs. "Many of the young players who participate in the National Bank of Anguilla-sponsored inter-primary school tournament, for some inexplicable reason, do not play the game beyond primary school. We believe this speaks all about the lack of an adequate development programme."

In 2003, FIFA agreed to provide US$600,000 towards a $653,976 centre and pitch, which was inaugurated by Sepp Blatter in 2010, yet the national team still do not play at home.

Anguilla played both legs of a 2014 World Cup qualifying tie with Dominican Republic away in San Cristobal, while none of the sidelined clubs have ever received invitations to play in the CFU Cup despite success at home.

World Soccer has seen the AFA's 2009 accounts and the FAP statement for 2009 and 2010. The accounts show that the government provided 15,000 East Caribbean dollars (£3,469) towards Anguilla playing in an Under-20 World Cup qualifier in Cuba. The CFU provided 137,886 East Caribbean dollars (£31,894) for "monies owed to AFA from World Cup qualifier".

Anguilla played El Salvador in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers, losing 16-0 on aggregate, with the "home" leg played this time in Washington DC.

The FAP statement shows that the AFA received US$499,980 from FIFA in 2010 and spent US$305,458 on the technical centre. Another US$91,658 of FAP funds went on "planning and administration" in 2009 and another US$96,135 in 2010.

Facing rebellion... Hughes

The sidelined clubs claim Guishard's wife works as AFA office manager and accuse the association of "nepotism" and "being run as a secret organisation".

The three clubs added: "Regarding the suspension of the president in the 'cash-for-vote' scandal, for instance, neither he nor the AFA has issued a statement clarifying the reason for his suspension. The president has neither admitted nor denied receiving the US$40,000 gift. It would be instructive to have him answer to that specific question under oath.

"The present executive's hold continues to be protected by the way the constitution is crafted. There is an urgent need for it to be reconstructed."

Kerthney Carty, Anguilla's coach for part of the 2010 qualifiers, did not respond to requests for a comment. Another former national coach, Scott Cooper, said: "If they have concerns of parity and finance they should look. I am shocked, really shocked. I hope there is nothing untoward. I could not see it, but one never knows in football."

The AFA did not respond to *World Soccer*'s requests for a comment.

Steve Menary

Homeless...Anguilla's national team still cannot play on the island, despite having a FIFA-funded centre and pitch

SPAIN

Abidal needs liver transplant

Eric Abidal, the Barcelona and French defender, is to undergo a liver transplant, a year after he had surgery to remove a tumour from his liver.

In a statement, Barcelona said: "Given the development of his medical condition, Abidal will undergo a liver transplant in the following weeks.

"The transplant is an option that has been considered since the beginning of his treatment a year ago.

"At the express wish of the player, the club request the utmost respect for the right to privacy and confidentiality."

Barcelona captain Carles Puyol added that Abidal was in good spirits.

"It is him who encourages us. His attitude is an example," said Puyol. "We are confident that he will come out of this. We will give him all the strength we have and we will support him and his family. I am convinced that soon he will be fine."

More surgery...Abidal

David CONN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Don't be fooled by the bumptious bumbler

Dave Richards, the Premier League chairman, has flourished for 12 unchallenged years by doing his business mostly within football's corridors of bureaucracy, not by being exposed to the light. The league never offers him for interview, a stance he tends to vindicate on the rare occasions he does venture into the view of the public. His latest episode found Richards seemingly safe enough, far away in Qatar. But at a conference there, he amiably declared not only that the English invented football, but "foreign gangs" – FIFA then UEFA – "stole" it.

The plaintive explanation that he was only joking did not work greatly in his favour, opening an unnecessary window on Richards' idea of humour. There followed the time-honoured ritual: first the disowning of Richards by the league he chairs, sighing the familiar line that he was speaking in "a personal capacity", followed by a defence of his virtues by Richard Scudamore, the chief executive.

"He has been great for the Premier League," insisted Scudamore, who also pointed to the chairman's work for good causes, charities – "the stuff which doesn't get mentioned". He was heroically unblushing.

The video of Richards stumbling into an ornamental fountain in a huge new building in the Gulf did not dilute his image as a throwback Englishman abroad.

On these occasions the football world gets a reminder of Richards' mediocrity, of how remarkable it is that, with so wretched a record at his club, Sheffield Wednesday and an engineering business which went bust, he has spent so long as the chairman of England's most glistening sporting export.

Richards joined the Wednesday board in October 1989 – just six months after 96 Liverpool supporters were killed at the club's ground, Hillsborough – and stayed on, with club secretary and safety officer, Graham Mackrell, even after the Taylor Report found the ground itself had been unsafe. Richards took years to agree to locate a memorial at Hillsborough, and when he finally did, in 1999, it did not look to have much heart in it.

That year, the signings Wednesday had made to solidify their presence in the Premier League failed lamentably and the wage bill Richards had sanctioned saddled the club with debts of nearly £20million, which dragged the Owls to League One. Just before they were relegated in 2000, Richards jumped, becoming the Premier League's chairman and paid £176,667 in his first year. Wednesday fans have been open-mouthed since at the brilliant rise of the man who left a plummeting legacy.

Yet those who characterise him as just a bumptious bumbler are missing a genuine understanding. Within the circular corridors of the Football Association at Wembley, many senior figures have a very different experience. Former chairman Lord Triesman told a parliamentary select committee inquiry last year Richards was an aggressive presence on the FA board. Richards denied bullying, but Triesman's account confirmed years of board members' reports that Richards blazes at the FA for the Premier League's interests, backing his stances with repeated threats its clubs would pull out of the FA Cup if their demands were not met.

> Richards has done "great" for the Premier League in Scudamore's view

It is wise to assume Richards would not have lasted so long had he been truly bumbling and ineffectual. The reality is that his stumble in Qatar coincided with the historic, final victory by the Premier League in its unappealing campaign for supremacy over the FA, who will cede all possible authority over how money is shared in English football, and fan issues including ticket prices.

Scudamore has won his war, in which Richards has been his faithful attacking front. That, partly, is surely what he meant, when excusing his chairman's gaucheness in Qatar. However hapless he appears in public, Richards, in Scudamore's view, has done "great" for the Premier League. WS

"He's extraordinary. He's spectacular. But he will only become a legend when, like Pele, Maradona, Zidane and myself, he wins a World Cup"

Brazil icon Ronaldo (right) points out the last frontier Lionel Messi still has to visit

REPORTS we couldn't make up

1 Vancouver Whitecaps striker Darren Mattocks was ruled out of action for an indefinite period after he suffered burns to his right arm and shoulder while cooking himself dinner.

Details of the freak accident are sketchy, but the 21-year-old Jamaican, who made his MLS debut this season, was taken to hospital where he was treated for burns and kept in for observation.

2 Robert Kutasi, the director of sport at Hungarian second division side Rakospalotai, committed suicide by jumping from a building after it was proven that six of his team had taken cash to fix matches.

"My life is over. I was betrayed by people I trusted," the 48-year-old is reported to have said in a suicide note.

3 Nelfi Ibanez has become the first woman in Peru to coach a men's professional team. Bolivia-born Ibanez has taken charge of Lima-based club Hijos de Acosvinchos, who play in the Peruvian second division.

Ibanez, who coached the Bolivian women's team in 2007, has her sights set on one day taking control of the men's national team. Before then, though, she is concentrating on taking the 2006 Copa Peru runners-up, who play at the small 2,000 capacity Colegio San Alfonso stadium, into Peru's top flight.

Respect...Ronaldo and Messi

SPAIN

Ronaldo and Messi make it a record-breaking season

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo are neck and neck in the race to win the ESM Golden Shoe as Europe's top league goalscorer for the 2011-12 season. Both have already scored 35 league goals in this campaign, nine more than nearest challenger, Robin Van Persie of Arsenal, who had scored 26 goals by the end of March.

Germany's two most prolific marksmen this season, Bayern Munich's Mario Gomez and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar of Schalke are also in the top 10 – on 23 and 22 league goals respectively.

Last season, Ronaldo won the award with 40 goals, while Messi triumphed in 2009-10 after scoring 34 in La Liga.

Messi recently became Barcelona's all-time top scorer, on 233 goals – at the age of 24– beating the previous record set by Cesar Rodriguez in the 1940s and 1950s.

Messi also became the first player to score five in a single Champions League tie, as Barcelona demolished Bayer Leverkusen 7-1 in the round of 16.

Meanwhile, Ronaldo become the fastest player to score 100 Spanish league goals after his two against Real Sociedad took him to 101 goals in 92 games, surpassing the record set by Ferenc Puskas, who scored 100 in 105 games.

• *ESM Golden Shoe standings, page 95*

■ OBITUARIES

MARQUITOS
(1933-2012)
The Spanish defender was part of the Real Madrid squad that won five successive European Cups, from 1956 to 1960, playing in four Finals. His grandson, Marcos Alonso, currently plays for Bolton Wanderers.

European Cup winner...Marquitos

John "Clarkie" SOUZA
(1911-2012)
A member of the USA team that beat England in the 1950 World Cup. He played 16 times for the United States, from 1947 to 1954, scoring his only two goals in consecutive games, against Mexico and Cuba in September 1949.

Timo KONIETZKA
(1938-2012)
West Germany international who scored the first-ever goal in the Bundesliga – for Borussia Dortmund against Werder Bremen in August 1963. As a coach, he led Zurich to the European Cup semi-finals in 1977.

Striker...Smolarek

Wlodzimierz SMOLAREK
(1957-2012)
Striker who was part of the 1982 Poland team that finished third at the World Cup in Spain. He scored 13 goals in 60 games for his country between 1980 and 1992. The father of current Poland international Euzebiusz Smolarek.

Jones MWEWA
(1974-2012)
Former Zambia international who played in three African Nations Cup finals, from 1996 to 2000, and won two Zambian championships with Power Dynamos.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Mesmerising Messi is re-writing the way the game is played

As the incredible Lionel Messi continues his assault on goal-scoring records, it should be noted that he is also re-writing the way that the game is played. Or, at least, the way that goalkeepers play it – or had better learn to play it.

He is "re-writing" in the sense that his play must surely lead to a rethink of two time-hallowed phrases that always crop up when we talk of goalkeepers: narrowing the angle and making yourself big. You've heard them a thousand times, always as a means of praising goalkeepers, as explanations of how skilful they are. But these are phrases that, in the Messi era, are starting to look decidedly shallow.

The skills involved have always seemed questionable anyway, involving – as they frequently do – the complicity of unthinking strikers who far too frequently seem determined to slam the ball into the goalkeeper, whether or not he's cleverly positioned himself.

Not so Messi, who has taken that hackneyed advertising phrase "adding another dimension" and made it reality. His new dimension is not new, of course, it's always been around, but it has never before been exploited the way Messi does it.

> Narrowing the angles is no longer enough for goalkeepers these days, at least not when they are facing Lionel Messi

Those angles so wonderfully narrowed by goalkeepers, have always been left-right, or east-west angles - the horizontal angles. But Messi has added the vertical, upward angle. Which greatly complicates the goalkeeper's task.

I've been looking at 12 recent Messi goals - three for Argentina, and nine for Barcelona in La Liga. Of those, five were scored by dinking the ball softly but firmly over the goalkeeper. Actually, of those 12 goals, one was a penalty kick, which I'm going to ignore - so five out of 11 goals - nearly 50 per cent - were "dinks".

Watching the goalkeepers, it is clear that all of them are aware of the traditional east-west positioning and angles. In each of the five dink goals the keeper has both arms held low, angled out away from his body (presumably that makes him big), inevitably meaning that any arm reaction when the ball is chipped or lobbed or scooped over his head is late, an ineffectual raising of the arms to flap at the ball that is already beyond reach. Not one of the goalkeepers managed to get a touch of the ball.

What is most extraordinary is the sureness and the precision of Messi's touch. All five goals under discussion were scored from one-on-one situations with the goalkeeper; all of them well within the penalty area, typically about 10 to 12 yards from the goal. This meant that Messi was leaving himself almost no margin of error in getting the ball over the goalkeeper and under the bar.

The arc of the ball had to be just right. In four of these five goals, the ball dropped into the goal just under the bar - one of them hitting the underside of the bar on its way in. The only variation was against Switzerland when Messi, on the run, performed his patented hybrid shot - the half-chip, half-scoop - that saw the ball sail high but more to the side of the keeper and bounce once before rolling into the net.

Every week, millions of fans can see Messi demonstrate that there is a highly viable alternative to the standard methods used by strikers in one-on-one situations with the goalkeeper - shooting to the left or the right (or hitting the ball hard at the keeper), or maybe trying to dribble around him. Those activities don't look so good any more. Not when compared to the variety of Messi dinks.

So narrowing the angles is no longer enough for goalkeepers, at least not when facing Messi. But for how long will it be just Messi? Other strikers will surely learn to dink the ball - maybe not as perfectly as Messi, but smartly enough to pose a threat that must unbalance the traditional goalkeeper angle-watching routine. WS

"Do I regret the decision to sack Stefano Pioli? I'm eating my second testicle; I already ate the first"

Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini on firing his coach in August

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

New role ...Panucci

EUROPE

Serie A sides Novara and Cagliari both reappointed the coaches they had parted company with earlier in the season. **ATTILIO TESSER** returned to Novara after 37 days, replacing Emiliano Mondonico who was sacked despite leading the team to victory over Internazionale at San Siro, while **MASSIMO FICCADENTI** took over from Davide Ballardini at Cagliari following a 6-3 thrashing at Napoli.

Former Italy, Milan, Real Madrid and Roma defender **CHRISTIAN PANUCCI**, who had been working as a television pundit, joined Serie A side Palermo as technical director.

Schalke have activated a purchase clause in **CHINEDU OBASI**'s loan contract from fellow Bundesliga side Hoffenheim and will sign the striker for £4million in the summer.

Australia midfielder **BRETT HOLMAN** signed a pre-contract agreement to join Premier League side Aston Villa from AZ Alkmaar of Holland at the end of the current season.

Former Bulgaria captain **KRASIMIR BALAKOV** quit Croatian side Hajduk Split to take over as coach of Kaiserslautern, who fired Marco Kurz after a 4-1 loss at home to Schalke left the Bundesliga side winless in 16 matches and bottom of the table, six points from safety.

In at Kaiserslautern ...Balakov

CZESLAW MICHNIEWICZ replaced Jacek Zielinski as coach of Polonia Warsaw.

MIGUEL ANGEL LOTINA took over from Jose Molina as coach of Villarreal after the La Liga side lost 1-0 at Levante. **ALVARO CERVERA** left Spanish second-tier club Recreativo Huelva to take charge of Racing Santander, who dismissed Juan Jose Gonzalez after four months.

Former national coach **STOYCHO MLADENOV** returned for a third stint in charge of CSKA Sofia. Dimitar Penev, who was replaced after the team lost 2-0 at Chernomorets Burgas in their first league game after the winter break, remained with the Bulgarian club as supervisory board chairman.

GEORGI IVANOV also took charge of a Bulgarian club for the third time, replacing Nikolay Kostov as coach of Levski Sofia until the end of the season. Kostov quit following the 1-0 loss at home to Minyor Pernik that left the 26-time champions third in the Bulgarian league. It was Levski's first league defeat since the former midfielder had taken charge in November.

MIHAI STOICHITA replaced Ilie Stan as coach of Steaua Bucharest the day after the Romanian club's goalless home draw with Gaz Metan Medias.

Sochaux promoted reserve-team boss **ERIC HELY** to the role of first-team coach on an interim basis after sacking Mecha Bazdarevic. Fellow Ligue 1 strugglers Auxerre replaced their boss, Laurent Fournier, with **JEAN-GUY WALLEMME**, who will combine the job with his role as coach of Congo's national team.

Bolton Wanderers signed Scotland under-21 winger **GREGG WYLDE** from Rangers after he took voluntary redundancy with no pay-off from the financially-stricken defending Scottish champions.

JIM JEFFERIES replaced Jim McIntyre as coach of Scottish Premier League strugglers Dunfermline Athletic.

Estonia, who host the European Under-19 Championship in July, appointed former national boss **ARNO PIJPERS** as the junior side's coach.

Former international referee **KARL-ERIK NILSSON** has succeeded the retiring Lars-Ake Lagrell as president of the Swedish Football Association.

JULIUS KVEDARAS was elected as the new president of the Lithuanian Football Federation after the outgoing Liutauras Varanavicius chose not to seek a new term.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Sao Paulo player **JOSE MARIA MARIN** replaced Ricardo Teixeira as head of the Brazilian football federation and the 2014 World Cup organizing committee. Teixeira also resigned from the FIFA ExCo, where his place has been taken by **MARCO POLO DEL NERO**.

CONCACAF

Former Germany defender **ARNE FRIEDRICH**, who was released by Wolfsburg in September, signed a one-year deal with MLS club Chicago Fire.

In charge...Cocu

Cocu takes up PSV challenge

PSV Eindhoven put ex-Holland midfielder **PHILLIP COCU** and FC Eindhoven's **ERNEST FABER** in charge of first-team affairs until the end of the season after parting company with coach Fred Rutten following a 3-1 defeat by NAC – the Eredivisie club's third successive loss.

"If we become champions I will get myself a Mohawk like [Remy] Cabella or [PSG's Jeremy] Menez – one side blond, brown in the middle. It will make everyone laugh."

Eccentric owner Louis Nicollin on how he plans to celebrate Montpellier's possible, unexpected title success

Appointments, sackings and loans

AFRICA

One-time Gambia boss **PAUL PUT** was named coach of Burkina Faso, succeeding Paolo Duarte who was fired after this year's African Nations Cup finals.

Technical director **AUGUSTO PALACIOS** was put in temporary charge of Orlando Pirates after the South African club suspended coach Julio Leal.

ASIA

Former Serbia international **SLAVISA JOKANOVIC** was appointed boss of Thailand's Muang Thong United after former England striker Robbie Fowler quit as player-coach.

KATSUSHI KAJII replaced Jose Carlos Serrao as Gamba Osaka coach after the club's worst start to a season left them pointless in the J.League and AFC Champions League after five successive defeats.

PAULO SILAS took over from Bruno Metsu as coach of Al Gharafa after the Qatari club lost 5-1 to Al Rayyan.

Qatar post ...Silas

Al Jazira sacked coach Franky Vercauteren and replaced him with former Gremio boss **CAIO JUNIOR**. "We tried to find harmony but Vercauteren did not get along with the players," said a spokesman for the UAE club.

Calling it a day...Ooijer

EUROPE

Cologne director of sport **VOLKER FINKE** has left the Bundesliga club "by mutual consent".

Ajax defender **ANDRE OOIJER** will retire at the end of the season. The 37-year-old, who won 55 caps for Holland, also played for PSV Eindhoven and Blackburn Rovers during his career.

SOUTH AMERICA

Corinthians released former Brazil striker **ADRIANO** after an Achilles tendon injury and weight problems limited him to just eight appearances for the club.

RAMON DIAZ quit as coach of Independiente after just six months in charge, following four successive losses at the start of the Argentinian clausura to equal the club's worst-ever start.

CONCACAF

Toronto cancelled the contract of Ecuador defender **GEOVANNY CAICEDO**, who joined the MLS club from LDU Quito in January, after he failed to settle in Canada.

AFRICA

Ghana Premier League side Hearts of Oak, trailing rivals Asante Kotoko by nine points after 19 games, sacked Serbian coach **NEBOJSA VUCICEVIC**.

ALEXANDRE BELINGA, coach of Unisport Bafang, quit two days after the Cameroon club reached the first qualifying round of the CAF Confederation Cup, citing "lack of respect" and non-payment of wages.

ASIA

Al Wasl goalkeeper **MAJED NASSER**, who has won 61 caps for the United Arab Emirates, announced his retirement after receiving a 17-match ban for slapping rival coach Quique Sanchez Flores of Al Ahli on the back of the head after defeat in the Emirates Cup semi-final.

Former England defender **GRAHAM ROBERTS** resigned as coach of Nepal after the AFC Challenge Cup hosts lost all three of their games in this year's tournament.

OCEANIA

Wellington Phoenix midfielder **TIM BROWN**, who captained New Zealand at the Confederations Cup in 2009, is to retire at the end of the A-League season. Brown, 31, who won 30 caps, wants to turn his attention to study.

New direction...Brown

OUT

Weighty matters ...Adriano

Stevanovic steps down from Ghana job

Serbian coach Goran Stevanovic left his role as Ghana's national team boss despite losing just one competitive game during his 14-month tenure.

His downfall came after losing the 2012 African Nations Cup semi-final to Zambia.

African Nations Cup defeat...Stevanovic

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

England contenders... Hodgson (left) and Redknapp

Hodgson should have got the England job – in 1994

Interesting to see that after what seemed a shoo-in for Harry Redknapp as the new England manager, there has been word that Roy Hodgson might also be a candidate. Better late than never, one might say.

As one who has known, liked and respected Roy as a man and as a manager, I would have been delighted to see him get the job...in 1994. That was the year in which he so surprisingly and laudably got little Switzerland all the way to the World Cup finals in the USA, where they certainly did not disgrace themselves. But Roy was passed over, though years later he would have other international experience when he made a competent job of managing Finland.

Lightning doesn't strike twice, and I don't think Roy, though he's proving a success at West Bromwich Albion, will get the job this time, either. But I have been a little surprised by certain criticisms of his career which have been aired. True, he had a very thick time of it at Liverpool, but that was utterly predictable, given the profound affection felt by sentimental Scousers for Kenny Dalglish, another current example of lightning not striking twice. Once Kenny had stated his desire to return to Anfield as manager, Roy might just as well have resigned.

> It was surprising to see Hodgson's meticulous coaching methods criticised during his time at Liverpool

It was surprising, though, to see Hodgson's meticulous coaching methods criticised. But there was no mention of his remarkable success with Sweden's Malmo, which won the huge admiration of former Internazionale full-back, and by then director, Giacinto Facchetti. I watched with an appreciative Giacinto as Roy enthusiastically coached his team – and was prepared to do so for hours on end. Yes, Roy eventually upset the Italian soccer press when coach of Inter and he left for Blackburn Rovers, but president Massimo Moratti still asked him back as a consultant.

As for Harry, he doesn't coach at all, though to be fair there isn't much time for it anyway at international level.

His captain's voice...Di Matteo (left) allowed Terry to do most of the talking before the Champions League game against Napoli

Terry as Chelsea manager? Stranger things have happened

How interim is interim? Surely it would be a sensible, if highly unusual, move for Roman Abramovich to give Roberto Di Matteo an extended run in managerial office after not only the remarkable 4-1 recovery against Napoli but also the 1-0 victory in Lisbon against Benfica.

Against the Portuguese, Di Matteo gambled with such unexpected success on leaving out the likes of Didier Drogba, Frank Lampard and Michael Essien, and restoring to the side the seldom-used Salomon Kalou, who duly scored the winning goal, and Paulo Ferreira.

At least Di Matteo, determined to refresh a tiring team, must also have delighted the oligarch by using Fernando Torres from the first, and with such abundant reward. He was indeed taking a chance in preferring Torres, seemingly revived at home to Leicester City in the FA Cup with two belated goals, but far less impressive at home to Tottenham Hotspur. But in that game Drogba, who had so splendidly scored one headed goal and set up the vital fourth against Napoli, had looked a weary figure.

In the event Torres was a revelation in Lisbon. Seemingly liberated from the pall of ineffectuality which had hung over him, he was a constant threat and so coolly and effectively first beat Jardel, then gave Kalou a chance which he could hardly spurn – thus, one supposes, enabling Abramovich to think that he had been right all along.

It might be thought that Di Matteo would continue to manage *faute de mieux* (for lack of anything better) and a kind of unstated partnership with John Terry might surely work. What leading manager in his senses would put his head in the lion's mouth at Stamford Bridge, unless he was waiting there for the inevitable vast pay-off? Brendan Rodgers, who served as an assistant coach at Chelsea, and now such a highly promising young manager at Swansea City, expressed horror at the prospect of becoming Chelsea's manager.

Stranger things, of course, have happened there, not least the surprising appointment and substantial stay of Avram Grant, who seemed to be favoured by Abramovich and has recently claimed credit for Chelsea's run to the 2008 Champions League Final. However, the rumour, strongly denied by the club, that the players excluded him from a pre-match meeting, was persistent. Now he has landed in Belgrade with Partizan where, as usual, he is talking a good game though the team has started to waver.

> What leading manager in his senses would put his head in the lion's mouth at Stamford Bridge?

The feeling that Di Matteo was playing second fiddle to Terry was not so much engendered by his captain's exhortations from the sidelines after being forced off against Napoli, but by the fact that at the pre-match press conference he had simply taken over while Di Matteo sat quietly beside him.

In the final analysis, how much can and does a manager do? Long ago, in the mid-1950s in Rome, I came to know the wily old fox Bela Guttmann. He'd just been sacked by top-of-the-table Milan, and told me a story to illustrate the Italian obsession with managers, which is hardly confined to Italy.

One day, he said, Lucchese, then a lesser team in Serie A, were due to travel to Turin to meet the mighty Juventus. On the way, their unfortunate manager died, throwing the directors into panic. How could any Italian team take the field without a manager? They phoned around desperately until at last they found a manager available, who arrived just in time to take his seat on the bench. Lucchese then managed to achieve a draw and the players carried the manager off on their shoulders.

Forget Messi, Pele was the best

As the plaudits shower on the gifted Lionel Messi, why do I keep thinking about Ron Clarke, a largely forgotten Australian athlete, a middle-distance runner who, between Olympiads, set record after record, but who, when it came to the Games themselves, never came close to a gold medal? Anti-climax after four years' anti-climax.

So where is the analogy with Messi, author of those five glorious goals against Bayer Leverkusen? A somewhat distant one, I admit, but simply that for all his brilliance with Barcelona he made scant impact for Argentina in the 2010 World Cup. Decent enough displays early on, but no impact in the crushing defeat by Germany.

Afterwards, he insisted he was satisfied with his own performance. But the fact seemed to be that where he has such a free rein at Barcelona, popping up wherever he wants to, under Diego Maradona he was confined to being in a more lateral position.

If the World Cup, like the Olympics, is the ultimate criterion, how can the best of the best be anybody but Pele? With all due deference to the splendid Messi, when did he ever head a goal like the one Pele headed to put Brazil ahead against Italy in the 1970 World Cup Final? Not to mention the two jewelled diagonal passes he gave later in the game to set-up two more goals...

Pele, for me, was incomparable.

Simply the best...the one and only Pele

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COUNTDOWN GETS SERIOUS

As the big kick-off approaches, correspondents from the two host nations report on how last-minute preparations for Euro 2012 are coming along, while we highlight some potential stars of the tournament

Spectacular...fireworks illuminate the sky above the new National Stadium in Warsaw during its official opening

POLAND
DARIUSZ KUROWSKI in Warsaw

Poles tune in to national soap opera

The co-hosts hope to make their mark after battling through setbacks

Exactly 100 days before Euro 2012 kicks off, the first game was played at the new National Stadium in Warsaw, with Poland drawing 0-0 against Portugal. The new venue – the other three are in Poznan, Gdansk and Wroclaw – was constructed especially for the European Championship and had been officially launched in February with a concert featuring several well-known local bands.

In between the two events, the stadium became the main actor in a national soap opera.

It had been due to be formally opened last June, but the ceremony was delayed because work was needed to reinforce the stairwells. Then the Super Cup match between Legia Warsaw and Wisla Krakow, in the middle of February, was pencilled in as the big curtain-raiser. The police, however, refused to give the green light for the game because of "insufficient wireless communication inside the venue to guarantee spectators' security" and Andrzej Rusko, president of Ekstraklasa, the Polish league, had to call the game off.

The decision sparked outrage among the country's politicians. Rafal Kapler, the chairman of the stadium governing body, came under fire from opposition MPs for receiving a £115,000 bonus despite the delay in the stadium's construction and stepped down.

Sport minister Joanna Mucha ended speculation about the stadium construction costs when she declared that it was £360million.

Two weeks later, fortunately without any problems, Poland met Portugal and the new 58,000-capacity venue attracted universal acclaim. At night, the illuminated ground looks like a huge white and red basket on the banks of the Vistula river, in the heart of Warsaw. The most impressive element of the stadium construction is a roof with a network of steel lines connected to a central spire, located 30 metres above the centre circle, and featuring four giant TV screens.

But while the National Stadium looks fantastic, elsewhere the preparations are not looking so impressive. For example, the stadium in Wroclaw was recently closed for a few weeks. The official explanation was that the city council needed to sort out its long-term licence. Unofficially, the electrical system at the stadium needed to be improved to bring it up to tournament standards.

Meanwhile, the biggest problem remains public transport infrastructure between the four host cities. Parts of the main motorways connecting Warsaw with Poznan and Gdansk are still under construction, and it is almost certain that they will not be completed in time for the tournament. And there will be no motorway between Poznan and Wroclaw.

The rail transport system is still not of the highest standard, but Polish Railways plan to launch a special tournament schedule with more trains to make fans' lives easier.

> "I will not extend Smuda's contract before the tournament, only after it"
> Polish FA chairman Grzegorz Lato

"Despite all these problems, Poland is a huge winner," declared Michal Nykowski, chairman of the Polish Tourism Development Agency. "When I visit our stadiums and airports I realise how much our 'public space' has improved recently. They will be our trophies for years."

Poland has been rewarded by 13 of the 16 Euro 2012 finalists opting to base themselves in the country during the tournament. England and Holland will be staying in hotels in the centre of Krakow, while Italy will be based very close to the former capital, which has unofficially been called "the fifth host city".

Meanwhile among Polish fans, levels of optimism shot up following December's draw in Kiev. Franciszek Smuda's team were drawn in Group A with Russia, the Czech Republic and Greece. It was described as "the

miraculous draw" or "the ideal group" by most media.

"I am so happy, because we have a real chance to reach the knockout stage," said Polish FA chairman Grzegorz Lato. "I lost a bet of €20 with Michel Platini because I said that we would face England again [like in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers]. I can only sympathise with my Ukrainian friend [FA president] Grygoriy Surkis who will have Sweden, England and France in their group."

Caution over Smuda

But even after this "miraculous draw", Lato, who had earlier declared that "the knockout stage is our minimum aim", seemed to be rather more cautious when it came to the future of coach Smuda.

Lato said: "I will not extend Smuda's contract before the tournament, only after it. I do not want to make the same mistake as my predecessor [Michal Listkiewicz, who signed a new contract with former coach Leo Beenhakker just before Euro 2008]."

Smuda's players were praised by the media after the goalless draw with Portugal, a result that was described as "the last exam before the finals".

"We should pay tribute to our defence," said Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny, not for the first time Poland's best player, "because they stopped one of the strongest attacking teams in the world".

Home comforts...Poland's Lukasz Piszczek (left) beats Helder Postiga of Portugal at the National Stadium

Despite this, Poland will, in theory, be the worst team in the tournament. In the most recent FIFA world rankings, they dropped to 75th – their lowest-ever position. "For me this ranking is not important at all," Smuda has repeatedly declared. But he knows very well that his players need as much self-confidence as possible before the opening game against Greece on June 8. So six days earlier, in their last friendly, they will face Andorra, 205th in the FIFA rankings (fourth from the bottom).

While they showed against Portugal they can keep a clean sheet, they need to show they can score, too. Without goals it will be impossible to reach the knock-out stage even from "the ideal group". **WS**

In the mood...Polish fans take in the atmosphere in their new stadium

OLEG ZADERNOVSKY in Kiev

Fans get set for bumpy ride

Supporters prepare to be taken out of their comfort zone

Just 12 months ago Ukraine's ability to host Euro 2012 to the highest European standards looked in serious danger. The country, one of the poorest on the continent, had problems with completing stadiums in Kiev and Lviv, as well as struggling with the construction and rebuilding of airports in the host cities.

Under the real threat of losing the tournament, the Ukraine government had no alternative other than to increase the projected cost of preparations by £300million. In mid-March, president Viktor Yanukovych declared that the overall expenditure by Ukrainian tax payers had reached £3.33billion. In contrast, Poland has spent £1.08bn.

The new money, however, improved everything, especially the building infrastructure. Three months before the biggest sporting event ever held in the country, all four Ukrainian host cities – Kiev, Lviv, Donetsk and Kharkiv – are ready according to Valeriy Zhaldak, the deputy head of the national agency for Euro 2012 preparations.

"We're intentionally not carrying out a rating of the four Ukrainian host cities and do not want to compare them in terms of advantages and disadvantages," says Zhaldak. "Our approach is that every city is unique both in terms of tourism infrastructure and business and level of industrialisation.

"Of course, Donetsk and Kharkiv are business centres, Lviv and Kiev are tourist areas. Believe me, I have been to Kharkiv and Donetsk quite a few times and there are things to see there and surprises for our foreign guests. At the same time, we are doing our best to ensure order and security during the stay of a great number of people in each of the four cities."

UEFA president Michel Platini admitted an extraordinary breakthrough had been made in the building of infrastructure, despite the world economic crisis. "The fact that this country has made a 30-year breakthrough in the development of airports, hotel and motorway infrastructure is unbelievable," the Frenchman acknowledged.

But UEFA has also noted that transport and logistics problems could arise during the tournament and it expects the Ukrainian authorities to be flexible in dealing with the issues.

Borys Kolesnikov, the deputy prime minister claims Kiev will provide a decent transport service for Euro 2012 and that guests will not feel any discomfort. "In the last three weeks alone Kiev has received 400 buses and trolleybuses, and later it will get another 600," he says. "By the middle of the year Kiev will replace its Soviet-era fleet which it has had since 1991. There will be no problems with transport provision for Euro-2012 or afterwards."

Getting ready...Kiev prepares to welcome the rest of Europe

> Accommodation for visiting fans is still the biggest problem

With Ukraine's railways obsolete and out of date, trains have been bought from South Korea and the Czech Republic. "These trains will run on the route Kharkiv-Dnipropetrovsk-Donetsk-Kharkiv," says Kolesnikov. "They will provide communication between three cities in the east, each with a population of over one million."

Terrible queues

As ever, the devil is in the detail and the bright picture was spoiled by the country's first practical test. The first competitive game played by Dynamo Kiev at the new Olimpiysky National Sports Complex turned into a nightmare with terrible queues trying to enter the arena that will host the Euro 2012 Final.

The game attracted 68,000 fans and almost turned into a catastrophe. "A crowd of 10,000 at the north gate could not move at all," says Vitaliy Sych, chief editor of the influential *Correspondent* magazine, who witnessed the events. "Only one person per minute could pass through narrow turnstiles.

"A squeeze started and people broke the gates. Everybody rushed into the opened space but were thrown back outside by the stadium security. But it was not possible to get out with people pressed onto the metal barriers. Parents started to lift their children in the air trying to save them.

Accommodation for visiting fans is still the biggest unresolved problem. Nearly all Ukrainian hotels have raised their prices by four times the regular rate, causing concern at UEFA. "There are issues around the high cost of hotels in Ukraine in particular," says David Taylor, CEO of UEFA Events. "Of course UEFA cannot fix that ourselves. We don't manage hotels. But we do think it's not a very good image to present."

Only three of the 16 finalists will stay in Ukraine during Euro 2012: Sweden and France, and the hosts. "Not one city in Ukraine can compete with Polish cities in terms of logistics and comfort of transportation," says former national-team press officer Igor Miroshnichenko.

All of the stadiums and airports for Euro 2012 in Ukraine maybe fully built and ready for the tournament, but whether fans will themselves feel comfortable during the tournament remains to be seen. WS

SECRET WEAPONS

Morgan AMALFITANO

COUNTRY
France
CLUB
Marseille
POSITION
Midfielder
AGE
27 (10.03.85)

One of the best passers in Ligue 1, the right-sided or central midfielder had not made a single representative appearance prior to his senior debut in February's 2-1 win in Germany.

Was watched by Aston Villa and Newcastle United while at Lorient, but last summer opted to join Marseille, where he has showcased his versatility and intelligence.

Artem DZYUBA

COUNTRY
Russia
CLUB
Moscow Spartak
POSITION
Forward
AGE
23 (22.08.88)

Russia coach Dick Advocaat is said to rate the repertoire of this 6ft 4in striker, who is just as comfortable on the wing as he is as a centre-forward. Has a deft touch despite his physicality and is very self-assured on the ball.

Has graduated from the under-21s and made his senior debut in a friendly against Greece in November last year.

Kostas FORTOUNIS

COUNTRY
Greece
CLUB
Kaiserslautern (Ger)
POSITION
Midfielder
AGE
19 (16.10.92)

Traditionally more reliant on discipline and pragmatism than flair and adventure, Greece can always look to this Germany-based wide midfielder for a bit of quality and creativity.

Still a teenager, he joined Kaiserslautern, amid interest from several Bundesliga outfits, on a four-year deal in 2011 and was awarded his first senior cap in a friendly against Belgium earlier this year.

John GUIDETTI

COUNTRY
Sweden
CLUB
Manchester City (Eng)
POSITION
Forward
AGE
19 (15.04.92)

Has been in tremendous goalscoring form while on loan at Feyenoord, scoring 18 goals in his first 16 league games. Although still very raw, he could be crucial in helping to ease the workload of the talismanic Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Born in Stockholm to a family with Italian lineage, he spent several of his formative years in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, where his father had been posted.

Nick Bidwell profiles some of the tournament's potential surprise packages

Ola JOHN

COUNTRY
Holland
CLUB
Twente
POSITION
Winger
AGE
19 (19.05.92)

Enjoying a brilliant first full season in the Eredivisie, this creative and resilient left-winger may be a teenage novice but he has a wise head on his shoulders and fully deserved his first call-up to the *Oranje* squad in February.

Born in Liberia but raised in Holland, he is the younger brother of ex-Fulham and Holland striker Collins John.

Alessandro MATRI

COUNTRY
Italy
CLUB
Juventus
POSITION
Forward
AGE
27 (19.08.84)

A late-developer with matinee-idol looks who took some time to throw off a playboy reputation.

Tall, solidly-built and adept in the pivot role, he has scored goals aplenty since joining Juve from Cagliari, initially on loan, in January 2011. He has proved highly effective as an impact substitute, coming off the bench to grab an equaliser in the 1-1 draw at Milan earlier this season.

James McCLEAN

COUNTRY
Republic of Ireland
CLUB
Sunderland (Eng)
POSITION
Winger
AGE
22 (22.04.89)

Gutsy, non-stop wide man who has taken the Premier League by storm since incoming Sunderland manager Martin O'Neill plucked him out of the club's reserves a couple of weeks before Christmas.

Born in Derry, he was capped by Northern Ireland at under-21 level but has since opted to represent the Republic as a full international.

Tobias MIKKELSEN

COUNTRY
Denmark
CLUB
Nordsjaelland
POSITION
Winger
AGE
25 (18.09.86)

Considered by national coach Morten Olsen to be the heir apparent to long-serving Dennis Rommedahl on Denmark's right flank.

Full of tricks and with lots of pace, his switch to Nordsjaelland from Brondby in 2009 helped kick-start his career. Already experienced at under-21 level, he made his senior international breakthrough in a friendly against Finland in November 2011.

Nelson OLIVEIRA

COUNTRY
Portugal
CLUB
Benfica
POSITION
Forward
AGE
20 (08.08.91)

After many years of struggling to find strikers to match their production line of outstanding wingers, Portugal are finally beginning to reverse the trend thanks to the emergence of the young Benfica striker.

Lightning quick, an assured finisher and someone who relishes a physical contest, he was a pivotal figure as the under-20s finished runners-up at last year's world championship.

Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN

COUNTRY
England
CLUB
Arsenal
POSITION
Midfielder
AGE
18 (15.08.93)

Blessed with the upper body of a boxer and the twinkle-toes of a ballerina, the youngster has made quite an impact in his first season in the Premier League.

The son of former England and Stoke wide-man Mark Chamberlain, "the Ox" has won plenty of admirers with his combination of pace, power and tenacity. Could follow team-mate Theo Walcott as a major tournament wild card.

Arkadiusz PIECH

COUNTRY
Poland
CLUB
Ruch Chorzow
POSITION
Forward
AGE
26 (07.06.85)

Borussia Dortmund's Robert Lewandowski aside, Poland look to be seriously lacking in firepower up front. However, coach Franciszek Smuda may just find the answer to his problems in the shape of this gritty little front runner.

Standing at under 5ft 8in, Piech is not afraid of hard work and also knows where the goal is. Made his international debut against Bosnia & Herzegovina just before Christmas.

Michael RABUSIC

COUNTRY
Czech Republic
CLUB
Slovan Liberec
POSITION
Forward
AGE
22 (17.09.89)

In fine form in front of goal since joining high-flying Liberec from Brno last June, he was a key member of the Czech under-21 squad which took part in the 2011 European Championship in Denmark.

His goals have helped maintain Liberec's title battle with Sparta Prague and could be enough to persuade coach Michal Bilek to take a gamble on him for the senior Euros.

Marco REUS

COUNTRY
Germany
CLUB
Borussia Monchengladbach
POSITION
Forward
AGE
22 (31.05.89)

Set to join Dortmund for £14.6m in July, it says everything you need to know about Germany's abundance of riches that this virtuoso dribbler will almost certainly have to make do with a spot on the bench this summer.

A second striker or winger, he looks set to form part of the *Nationalmannschaft*'s Plan B, thrown on late in games with the brief of running the tiring opposition ragged.

Anton SHYNDER

COUNTRY
Ukraine
CLUB
Tavriya Simferopol
POSITION
Forward
AGE
24 (13.06.87)

This journeyman striker's strength in the air, willingness to run at defenders and good goalscoring record convinced Ukraine coach Oleg Blohkin to hand him his first cap last September.

Although he is unlikely to start at Euro 2012, he will make an energized and totally committed squad player.

Roberto SOLDADO

COUNTRY
Spain
CLUB
Valencia
POSITION
Forward
AGE
26 (27.05.85)

With Fernando Torres struggling to regain form, Soldado is making a most compelling case to lead the line for *La Roja*, not only finding the net regularly in La Liga but also coming off the bench to score twice in February's friendly against Venezuela.

Living proof that rejection by Real Madrid need not necessarily lead to career oblivion, and with Spain's acclaimed midfield supplying the bullets, Soldado could well have a tournament to remember.

Ante VUKUSIC

COUNTRY
Croatia
CLUB
Hajduk Split
POSITION
Forward
AGE
20 (04.06.91)

Reported to be on the wanted list of many leading European sides, including the likes of Arsenal and Chelsea, the striker is tipped to be one of the revelations of this summer's tournament.

Represents elegance, flair and sharpness all wrapped up in one smallish package, he was made club captain while still a teenager, and already has 10 international cap and three goals to his credit.

FORWARDS & PLAYMAKERS

STANDARD BEARERS

The big names who lead by example

Menacing...Keane

If one player encapsulates the essence of the modern Germany team, it has to be brilliant playmaker **MESUT OZIL.** Just one of several members of the squad with overseas roots, the Ruhr-born 23-year-old of Turkish lineage is a symbol not only of the benefits of sporting multiculturalism but a sea change in the attitude to the game in the country.

Not so long ago, the German style was synonymous with power, endurance, engagement and brute force. But the new millennium brought with it a radical rethink and, under *Bundestrainers* such as Jurgen Klinsmann and current incumbent Joachim Low, the emphasis has switched to technical expertise, quick movement, invention and risk-taking – all qualities the Real Madrid star has in abundance.

Ozil's club-mate and Portugal captain **CRISTIANO RONALDO** undoubtedly has much riding on this European Championship. Invariably sensational with Manchester United and then Real Madrid, he has, for the most part, come up short in major international tournaments, a mystifying state of affairs for someone with his world-class ability.

Only with an on-song Ronaldo can the *Seleccao* entertain any hope of making progress from the "group of death" that is Pool B.

In the goalscoring form of his life in the Premier League with Arsenal, Holland's front-man extraordinaire **ROBIN VAN PERSIE** also has a lot to prove this summer. Certain mischief-makers in his homeland like to point out that Van Persie has a poorer international strike rate than fellow national-team marksman **KLAAS-JAN HUNTELAAR** – 25 goals in 62 games for Van Persie, 31 in 50 for Huntelaar – and that, up to now, RVP has not exactly covered himself in glory in tournament action, scoring just four goals in two World Cups and Euro 2008. Such talk is a little unfair, though, with the analysis conveniently forgetting that Van Persie has spent most of his *Oranje* career on the left wing. As he has proved with Arsenal, he is an altogether different proposition through the middle.

Inventive...Ozil

Top...Huntelaar

Featuring up front for teams designed to be solid and sturdy rather than artistic, the likes of Sweden's **ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC** and **NICKLAS BENDTNER** of Denmark will both be carrying a very heavy load in June. Provided Ibrahimovic sparks into extravagant life, the Swedes have a chance, while Bendtner, for all his critics in England, is the best hope of goals the Danes have. Just as precious for the Republic of Ireland is record goalscorer **ROBBIE KEANE**, who is still a menace at the point of attack or slightly deeper.

Point to prove...Ronaldo

In the last of our series on the potential stars of the tournament, Nick Bidwell selects the continent's best attacking talent

ON THE UP

Those that are rising to the challenge

Despite **DAVID VILLA**'s non-availability through injury and **FERNANDO TORRES**' dramatic loss of confidence, Spain boss Vicente Del Bosque need have no worries about who to select as his solo striker. Intelligent, strong and anything but a slouch technically, Athletic Bilbao's **FERNANDO LLORENTE** can make a difference in all manner of ways. And with those creative geniuses Andres Iniesta and Xavi delivering right to his door, the 27-year-old should be one to watch. It is incredible to think that he was once considered surplus to requirements by ex-Athletic coach Javier Clemente.

Making a difference... Llorente

At the start of last season, **DANNY WELBECK** was only the sixth-choice front man at Manchester United. But how the 21-year-old has turned his fortunes around, impressing during a loan spell at Sunderland, becoming a United regular this term and now looking a good bet to take the place of suspended England talisman Wayne Rooney in the opening two games of Euro 2012. Another great example of United's flair for producing attacking all-rounders of considerable verve and self-assurance.

Change in fortune...Welbeck

Ready...Peckhart

Although Greece have bags of experience up front, the suspicion is that the likes of Georgios Samaras, Fanis Gekas, Angelos Charisteas and Dimitris Salpigidis are either over the hill or a little short of high-end international requirements. One way to freshen up the forward line might be to bring young PAOK Salonika striker **STEFANOS ATHANSIADIS** on board. They could do a lot worse.

After excelling at schoolboy, youth and under-21 level, Nuremberg front runner **TOMAS PEKHART** could soon establish himself in the senior Czech side. A star of the European Under-17 championship back in 2006, he is ready for the step up.

WORK IN PROGRESS

The options are still open for some

Temperament...Balotelli

For Italy coach Cesare Prandelli, the Euro 2012 clock is ticking ever faster and ever louder. The championship is only a few weeks away and doubts still persist as to the composition of the *Azzurri* front line and the identity of his No10. Experiments follow experiments, yet nothing quite works out.

Prandelli's biggest worry undoubtedly concerns his strike force. Italy were found wanting in this area at both Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup, and the overwhelming impression is one of far more questions than answers. Will prolific Udinese marksman **ANTONIO DI NATALE** and Internazionale's **GIAMPAOLO PAZZINI** ever deliver for the national team? Can Prandelli, he of the well-thumbed book of ethics, trust notorious Manchester City bad boy **MARIO BALOTELLI**? How sharp will **GIUSEPPE ROSSI** be after spending much of the season on the sidelines with damaged cruciate ligaments? Is it too late in the day for *Nazionale* new boys **ALESSANDRO MATRI** (Juventus), **SEBASTIAN GIOVINCO** (Parma), and Roma pair **FABIO BORINI** and **PABLO OSVALDO** to fully settle in?

A further headache is who to select on the shoulder of the strikers in the coach's preferred 4-3-1-2 system. Fiorentina's **RICCARDO MONTOLIVO** generally has struggled to look the part, **STEFANO MAURI** of Lazio blows hot and cold, while the naturalised Brazilian **THIAGO MOTTA** - who was deployed in the role in a recent friendly against the USA - is of much more use to the rear. Giovinco or Rossi could be a snug fit there but the all-important question is whether they will see enough of the ball. Veteran deep-lying playmaker **ANDREA PIRLO** - for whom this will be his sixth international tournament - does play a lot of long balls, effectively taking the *trequartista* out of the equation.

At the same time as France's coterie of high-class strikers – **KARIM BENZEMA**, **LOIC REMY** and **OLIVIER GIROUD** – go from strength to strength, *Les Bleus* boss Laurent Blanc has to face up to the fact that none of the candidates for the position of midfield provider-in-chief are in the best of sporting health. **SAMIR NASRI** has, on the whole, failed to live up to expectations following his big-money move last summer from Arsenal to Manchester City. After a sensational start in the international arena, Sochaux's **MARVIN MARTIN** has gone off the boil somewhat. And as for erstwhile golden boy **YOANN GOURCUFF**, a fragile psyche and even more delicate ankle have conspired to make him mortal. Nasri may be in pole position but the word is that he and Blanc do not see eye to eye.

Issues...Nasri

If Poland are to make any sort of headway on their home patch this summer, they have to pay immediate attention to a long-standing deficit: a certain lack of playmaking razzle-dazzle. Part of the problem is that coach Francziszek Smuda cannot decide whom to give the keys. One day **LUDOVIC OBRANIAK** is the man in possession, the next it's the turn of the Turkey-based **ADRIAN MIERZEJEWSKI**. It really should be a simple choice. Obraniak has been in sparkling form since leaving Lille for Bordeaux in the January transfer window, while Mierzejewski is unable to hold down a regular spot at Trabzonspor.

Bearing in mind the predilection of Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin for battle-hardened experience, the natural assumption is that he will stay loyal in June to long-serving front-men **ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO** and **ANDRIY VORONIN**. Both are national treasures, both have put in the hard yards, and in the case of Shevchenko only the stony-hearted would not love to see the 35-year-old bow out from international football on such a high-profile occasion. Blokhin's difficulty, though, is that a case can equally be made for keeping the pair on the bench. Shevchenko is a shadow of the forward who once had the football world begging at his feet and Voronin, for all his trademark energy, is not a dependable finisher.

Home...Bezus

Should Blokhin be brave, he could go for younger models **ARTEM MILEVSKYI**, Shevchenko's Dynamo Kiev team-mate, **YEVHEN SELEZNYOV** of Shakhtar Donetsk, Simferopol's **ANTON SHYNDER** or **ROMAN BEZUS** of Vorskla Poltava.

Decisions for Russia coach Dick Advocaat as to the central striker in his 4-3-3. Does he pick **ALEXANDER KERZHAKOV** of Zenit, **ROMAN PAVLYUCHENKO** of Lokomotiv Moscow or **PAVEL POGREBNYAK**, who is currently in England with Fulham? **WS**

Claim...Pogrebnyak

Dispatches

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TIM VICKERY
in Rio de Janeiro

Teixeira walks away

The most powerful man in Brazilian football has lost everything

Just a few short months ago, Ricardo Teixeira's entourage were talking in terms of their man becoming FIFA president, the position held for so long by his former father-in-law, Joao Havelange, whose influence had been the overwhelming factor in Teixeira becoming boss of Brazil's FA, the CBF, in 1989.

More recently, Teixeira also filled the position of president of the 2014 World Cup Local Organising Committee, an unusual accumulation of functions, and one that placed huge powers of patronage in his grasp. He enjoyed free transit with Brazil's charismatic and popular president Lula, and was a long-term member of FIFA's ExCo.

Now he is nothing. Officially, Teixeira, 64, resigned from his posts on health grounds, leaving behind a testament of nauseating self pity. "In all these years I have done everything I could," he wrote, "sacrificing my health and renouncing irreplaceable time with my family. I have been criticised in the defeats and undervalued in the victories." In reality, relocating to the US was the culmination of a rout, as a series of carpets were swept from beneath his feet.

The biggest factor in his fall, though, was almost certainly his own incompetence – brought unflinchingly into the global spotlight as Brazil struggle to be ready for the 2014 World Cup. There was plenty of time to prepare. Brazil knew as far back as March 2003 that the tournament was theirs. But afraid of upsetting the federation presidents of Brazil's 27 states, Teixeira first successfully lobbied FIFA to increase the number of host cities to 12, and then refused to take responsibility for naming them.

Such delays hampered the project from the start and were augmented still further by Teixeira's love of behind-the-

THE VIEW FROM BRAZIL...

"[Teixeira] was the main person responsible for bringing the World Cup to Brazil. If he doesn't get our gratitude then he at least deserves our respect"

The new CBF president, Jose Maria Marin (right)

"I hope that the new president Jose Maria Marin, who stole a medal from a Corinthians player during the Copa Sao Paulo de Juniores, does not make that a habit in the Confederation" **Brazil striker turned politician Romario**

"A joke" **Marin defends his action of slipping one of the medals into his pocket**

End of an era...having brought the 2014 World Cup to Brazil, Teixeira has ceded all responsibilty for running the tournament

scenes politicking; working to ensure, for example, that the stadium of his political opponents Sao Paulo FC was excluded from the World Cup. He told the nation that all the money to be spent on stadiums would be private. In fact, the vast majority is public. And the Lula government stood by with alarming complacency, turning a blind eye to planning problems and to the fact that the Local Organising Committee was basically the Teixeira gang, with no substantial representation from civil society.

A football fanatic, Lula had been critical of Teixeira when in opposition. But he wanted to play the global statesman, and soon after coming to power in 2002 he realised that one of his most effective foreign policy resources could be the national team – effectively owned by Teixeira. And so the two formed an alliance. Teixeira even took the team to play a match in Haiti, where Brazil head a United Nations peace-keeping force.

Things changed dramatically when Lula gave way to Dilma Rousseff. Brazil's first female president might have been Lula's hand-picked successor, but she has a mind of her own. A formidable figure, tortured by the military dictatorship in the early 1970s, she has given her life to the cause of changing her country. She gave the impression of viewing Teixeira as a representative of the oligarchy – bloated and inept, self-serving and whisky-sodden – that she sought to expel from Brazilian life. She refused to meet him. Suddenly Teixeira had no access in Brasilia, and it also became clear that the new administration would be more willing to look under the rocks at some of the scandals that had long surrounded the CBF boss. A decade ago, for example, a Congressional Committee of Inquiry had recommended his prosecution.

There were big changes, too, at FIFA. Perhaps disappointed that Sepp Blatter appeared to be grooming Michel Platini for the succession, Teixeira moved into Mohamed Bin Hammam's camp when the protest candidate emerged. He would pay a price when Blatter won again. Almost certainly looking to his legacy in what presumably is his last term of office, the FIFA president appeared less keen to protect the list of names alleged to have received bribes from the now-defunct ISL sports marketing company. Teixeira has been connected to this scandal, as has Havelange – who, at the age of 95, went through a health scare towards the end of March. There are hints that the ISL affair may also have opened up a rift between the two Brazilians.

Position crumbling

Marginalised by both FIFA and the Brazilian government, Teixeira's position was crumbling. Rousseff would have nothing to do with him and FIFA insiders hinted that the World Cup build-up would run more smoothly if he was out of the picture.

Rumours of his imminent resignation flew around Brazilian football in February – to be greeted first by the news that he was taking leave on health grounds but would certainly serve out his mandate, which lasted until 2015. But with his family relocating to Boca Raton in the USA, this was merely a smokescreen for a full retreat.

"Today we can celebrate," tweeted former international striker and current politician Romario when news broke of Teixeira's resignation. "We have exterminated a cancer from Brazilian football." Teixeira was unmourned. Last season supporters up and down the country staged demonstrations against him. But they may not be particularly impressed with his replacement, veteran politician Jose Maria Marin of the Sao Paulo federation.

It remains to be seen whether a new alliance of forces will work itself out in Brazilian football, with the clubs stepping forward to take a bigger role in the administration of the game. **WS**

> "I have done everything I could...I have been criticised in the defeats and undervalued in the victories"
>
> Teixeira pens a self-pitying final message on his resignation

NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

Gladbach on the rise

Champions League place is on the horizon

Late joy...Favre celebrates Igor de Camargo's 88th-minute winner at Bayer Leverkusen

Exactly 34 years after Borussia Monchengladbach last enjoyed elite European action - eliminated at the semi-final stage of the 1977-78 European Cup by Liverpool - the team known in Germany as *Die Fohlen* (the foals) finally seem to be galloping again, heading toward the top-three Bundesliga finish that would see them bedding down in a better class of European stable: the Champions League.

Foals by name, foals by nature. Boasting a squad with an average age of under 25, Gladbach's bright young things – notably second striker or winger Marco Reus, attacking midfielder Patrick Herrmann, goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen and full-back Tony Jantschke – have a vitality and fearless innocence only matched by Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund. Allied to a gaggle of wise old heads such as captain and left-back Filip Daems, Brazilian central defender Dante and former international striker Mike Hanke they have the complete package at Borussia Park.

Any way you want it, the Gladbach class of 2011-12 can oblige, either keeping it tight at the back and sticking to a disciplined game plan, or making use of attacking assets such as lightning counter-attacks and slick combination play. As a unit they are maturing all the time, and for proof one simply has to look at this season's victories over Bayern Munich: 1-0 at the Allianz Arena on the opening day of the season and 3-1 on their own patch in January.

Any fair appraisal of Gladbach's rude health has to include a special mention for the sensible financial husbandry of president Rolf Konigs and the value-for-money recruitment policy of director of sport Max Eberl. However, no one has done more to bring back the good times to the Lower Rhine outfit than Swiss coach Lucien Favre, the former boss of Zurich and Hertha Berlin. In only a year at the helm he is already drawing comparisons with the late Hennes Weisweiler, the coach of the great Gladbach team of the 1970s.

Headhunted by Eberl in February 2011, Favre realised from the off that he had not signed on for a picnic. With only 16 points gleaned from 22 fixtures and morale in pieces, many of the fans seemed to have accepted their fate. But not Favre. Four months after being sacked by Hertha, this was just the sort of challenge he wanted. Critics called it "Mission Impossible"; Favre, though, saw light at the end of the tunnel.

Back from the brink

In no time at all, the players bought into Favre's footballing philosophy: meticulous defensive organisation, tactical flexibility and clinical chance-taking. A reborn side scrapped for win after win and ultimately saved their skins with a victory over Bochum in the relegation/promotion play-offs.

Paradoxically for such an elegant playmaker with Switzerland, Lausanne, Neuchatel Xamax, Servette and Toulouse, his credo as a coach owes far more to substance and efficiency. But Favre is no dry, dogmatic theorist either. He knew full well that his team had to develop more attacking capacity and this has been spectacularly achieved in the past few months.

More successful than they have been for years, Gladbach's number one problem will be staying competitive – and already the signs are not good. Rumours abound that Favre will not see out his current contract - which runs until June 2013 - and two of their biggest stars, Reus and Dante, are scheduled to leave in the summer.

Desired by the cream of Europe, the 22-year-old dribbling ace Reus has agreed to join hometown club Dortmund in a £14.5million deal, while Dante is set to move to Bayern.

Gladbach have always ended up selling their crown jewels, waving goodbye to the likes of Gunter Netzer, Rainer Bonhof, Uli Stielike, Lothar Matthaus and Stefan Effenberg. But haemorrhaging talent never gets any easier and, should Favre go, Gladbach might fade as quickly as they rose. Over to you, Max Eberl. WS

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY...

kicker SPORTMAGAZIN

Wünderkind pens new deal

Borussia Dortmund's attacking-third starlet Mario Gotze has said yes to a two-year contract extension, taking him through to the summer of 2016. German sources claim Arsenal were prepared to pay up to €40million for the 19-year-old. The financially impoverished Dortmund of a few years ago would have taken the money and run. Now, with the books in much better shape, they can afford to lap up the luxury of one of the best young players on the continent.

SID LOWE
in Madrid

Bilbao firmly in the picture

Athletic's Cup effforts have earned praise at home and abroad

Irresistable force...Llorente (second left) celebrates scoring against Manchester United in the Europa League at San Mames

It is a photo you see everywhere and there is barely a bar in Bilbao without one. It is a picture of a barge making its way up the Nervion river so jam-packed that you can't believe its passengers have not fallen off into the water below. It's a miracle the people squeezed along the river banks haven't fallen in too. Mind you, if they did they would probably tumble into one of the countless boats below - from dinghies to tugboats, from sailboats to rowing boats, battling to get alongside the barge.

The picture comes from 1984 and depicts the celebrations marking Athletic Bilbao's league and cup double – the last time the club won anything. It is an astonishing scene and there is something almost mythical about it. Just say the word *gabarra* (barge) and people immediately know what you are talking about.

There is only one image that competes with the barge for prevalence and that is of the legendary striker Pichichi, who played between 1911 and 1921 and gave his name to the league's top scorer award. There are reproductions of the famous painting of him by the artist Aurelio Arteta on walls throughout the city and there is even a bust of Pichichi at San Mames, Athletic's home ground, where teams lay flowers on their first visit to the stadium.

> "Athletic are amazing. They run so hard, up and down, all of them, all the time"
> Pep Guardiola

Few clubs, in fact few cities, do tradition, history, identity and symbolism like Athletic Bilbao – a club that still plays with only Basque players (even if the definition of Basque is somewhat elastic). The stadium is known as "the Cathedral" and rarely has it been a place of such worship as this year. At last there might be a new picture to replace the *gabarra* and the fans can hardly contain their excitement.

Athletic Bilbao will meet Barcelona in the Final of the Spanish Cup on May 25 and had also progressed to the quarter-finals of the Europa League after they beat favourites Manchester United. Actually, they hammered the English champions, completely out-running, out-playing and out-thinking them. As United manager Alex Ferguson explained after his side had been beaten home and away: "They have a cause and it is wonderful to see a team with such energy. Their work rate is higher than anyone I have seen in Europe."

Athletic's two games against United were their best performances of the season and their supporters celebrated long into the night, with some suggesting that the return leg was the best game they had ever seen at San Mames.

Demanding and obsessive

They call Athletic's coach Marcelo Bielsa *El Loco* (the madman) and teenage striker Iker Muniain says he is "even madder" than you think: intense, demanding, obsessive over the tiniest details. Bielsa joined Athletic in the summer and Pep Guardiola has even suggested the Argentinian is the best coach in the world.

"Athletic are an amazing team," says the Barca boss. "They run so hard, up and down, up and down, up and down, all of them, all of the time – up, down, up, down, up, down."

Traditionally a team that has been defined by its directness, they are most "English" of Spanish sides. Athletic still have that intensity and physical presence, but now they play on the floor and they are combining better. Fernando Llorente scored a wonderful goal against United on the volley and when Andoni Iraola put the ball fractionally wide it was one of the great goals that never was.

But just when they looked like candidates for La Liga's last Champions League place, Athletic slipped away domestically, losing three in a row. They have a small squad but do not rotate, even though they have been fighting on three fronts, which means the physical demands are great. No Spanish team has played more games than them this season and fatigue – mental as much as physical - is in danger of setting in. Bielsa believes his side are still running more than anyone else but some players are struggling - and an injury to Llorente in particular has hit them hard.

Whatever happens, no one can ever take away those nights against United. And with a Spanish Cup Final and possibly further progress to the Europa League Final to come, hopes are high for more success. Who knows, this time next year there might even be a whole new set of pictures hanging on the walls of every bar in Bilbao. WS

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Ranieri pays the price for poor run

Inter boss becomes 19th coaching change under president Moratti

March ended on an all too familiar, all too predictable note; namely with the sacking of Internazionale coach Claudio Ranieri. This has been a season when nothing has seemed to go right for a club which recently dominated Italian football, winning five consecutive titles between 2006 and 2010.

The season began badly with the sacking in September of Gian Piero Gasperini after just five games in charge. Ranieri was then called in to set things to rights. And at first it appeared that the Ranieri cure was working. Not only did he take Inter into the knockout phase of the Champions League, by the middle of January his side had also picked up seven consecutive Serie A wins, topped off by a 1-0 victory over Milan that represented Inter's first Serie A derby success since January 2010.

From that moment on, however, something seemed to go wrong. In their next 10 Serie A games, Inter clocked up six defeats, three draws and just one win (at home to Chievo). That was bad enough, but it was made all the more painful by Inter's elimination from the Champions League by Marseille.

The straw which broke this particular camel's overburdened back came in late March when Inter lost 2-0 away to Juventus, despite giving one of their best performances of the season for the first 45 minutes. For Inter owner, petrol millionaire Massimo Moratti, this was simply one defeat too far.

Ever since the Calciopoli days, relations with Juventus have been regularly strained. In recent times, Inter have been annoyed by the Juventus request that their Serie A titles of 2005 and 2006, of which they were stripped in the wake of the federation's Calciopoli investigation, be "returned" to them. In particular, the 2006 title touches on a raw nerve because, in the end, that title was awarded to Inter.

For Moratti and Inter fans, the sporting rivalry with Juventus also touches on another raw nerve that goes back to the 1997-98 season. That was the year when Inter, coached by Gigi Simoni and inspired by Brazilian striker Ronaldo, appeared to be denied a sacrosanct penalty – for a foul by Mark Iuliano on Ronaldo – in a decisive, top-of-the-table clash against Juve in Turin in the fourth-last game of the season. Juve won that match 1-0 and went on to win the title, but Inter fans have never been convinced that sporting justice was done that April day.

Remarkable gamble

So, for all those reasons, if there was one defeat that was going to hurt more than the others, then Juve was the one. For the 19th time since he assumed control of Inter back in 1995, Moratti opted to replace his coach, in the process taking the remarkable gamble of replacing Ranieri with youth-team coach, Andrea Stramaccioni. Ranieri thus joins a growing list of illustrious names – including Ottavio Bianchi, Roy Hodgson, Simoni, Mirceau Lucescu, Marcello Lippi, Hector Cuper, Roberto Mancini and Rafael Benitez – who have been summarily dismissed (or resigned in Lippi's case) from the Inter job.

Significantly, of course, there is one exception among the 20 men who have coached Inter in the Moratti era. We are speaking of Jose Mourinho. He was by far Moratti's favourite coach, the only one who left of his own choice and against Moratti's will. As we all know, Mourinho's special status with Moratti owed everything to the coaching masterpiece that saw him lead Inter to a Champions League-Serie A-Italian Cup treble in 2010.

That heroic season seems to have left an indelible, "burnt out" mark on many of the key figures in that Inter team, and that point was one much highlighted by Italian commentators in their analysis of the Ranieri sacking.

There was also talk of the "post-Mourinho" effect and the fact that his successful spells at Porto, Chelsea and Inter were all followed by periods of relative instability as regards his successors. Gigi Delneri, Victor Fernandez, Jose Couceiro, Co Adriaanse and Jesualdo Ferreira all followed Mourinho at Porto before Andre Villas-Boas came, saw and conquered two seasons ago.

Likewise, Chelsea have had a sharp turnover of managers in the post Mourinho era with such as Avram Grant, Luiz Felipe Scolari, Guus Hiddink, Carlo Ancelotti and Villas-Boas all finally failing to match the requirements of club owner Roman Abramovich. So too with Inter, since Stramaccioni is Inter's fifth coach in the last two seasons, following on after Benitez, Leonardo, Gasperini and Ranieri.

Ranieri may have made mistakes in

Battle...Inter's Walter Samuel (right) competes with Martin Caceres of Juventus

INTER'S LACK OF COACHING STABILITY

his time at Inter, such as his handling of playmaker Wesley Sneidjer, his reliance on the old guard at the expense of younger players, and surprise selections such as those of Mauro Zarate and Diego Forlan in the 1-0 Champions League defeat away to Marseille.

In short, there are those who would argue that Ranieri too often changed both personnel and tactics. Yet the Inter run this spring has been too bad for it all to be blamed on Ranieri. It has been said before, but the suspicion remains that Inter's problems are as much about hunger and motivation as about coaching or personnel shortcomings.

> On the day of Inter's defeat by Juve, Moratti opted to watch the youth team

On top of everything else, Dame Fortune also seems to have turned her back on Inter. Ranieri could have saved his job, at least until next June, if Inter had progressed a bit further in the Champions League. However, Marseille eliminated Inter with an injury-time goal in both legs of their tie. In reality, Inter had been good value for a 0-0 draw in the first leg, rather than a 1-0 defeat and likewise, they had totally dominated the return at San Siro but got struck by that late sucker punch in a 2-1 win that saw them go out on away goals.

Stramaccioni has earned the job to the end of the season thanks to his work with the Inter under-19 side which he led to victory in the first edition of Next Generation Series – the so-called under-19 Champions League. On the day Inter were beaten 2-0 in Turin by Juventus, Moratti had significantly opted for the future, travelling to London to watch the youth team defeat Ajax in a penalty shoot-out in the NextGen Final.

He clearly liked what he saw, both on the pitch and on the coach's bench. It remains to be seen just how Stramaccioni will handle one of the oldest, most experienced and, until this year, most successful squads in Italy – not to mention a team captained by a player, Argentinian Javier Zanetti, who is two years his elder. **WS**

THE NEW MAN IN CHARGE AT INTER

Andrea STRAMACCIONI

- **Age 36 (09.01.76)**
- **A defender with Bologna, his playing career was ended by a serious knee injury in 1995.**
- **He joined the coaching staff at Roma in 2005, before moving to Inter in 2011.**
- **Appointed interim Inter coach in March 2012.**

VICTOR GUSEV
in Moscow

Bananas, a sign of a serious problem

Anzhi's new signing Samba caught up in racism controversy

Russian football keeps slipping on a banana skin. Anzhi Makhachkala's African centre-back Christopher Samba became the latest victim of racist abuse during his team's game away to Lokomotiv Moscow.

The incident was the third of its kind in the Russian top flight in the past year. In March 2011 a Zenit fan waved a banana at Anzhi's former Brazil left-back Roberto Carlos during a game in St Petersburg, while in June a banana was thrown from the stands during Anzhi's game at Samara Kryliya Sovetov.

A 23-year-old Samara fan, Vyacheslav Prokhorov, admitted responsibility after police tracked him down months later, but he insisted it had been no more than a sign of frustration at his team's performance. While the club were fined, it was difficult for the authorities to punish the perpetrator himself since racism is not covered by the "hooliganism" clause of Russian law. The maximum punishment Prokhorov faces is a ban on attending matches.

In the most recent case, both Lokomotiv and Anzhi accused each other's fans. A spectator allegedly ran down to the first row of the VIP section 15 minutes before the end of the game, then waited for the players to start heading into the tunnel before throwing a banana at Congo international Samba.

Unlike Roberto Carlos, who just threw the banana to the side of the pitch, Samba hurled it back to the stands. The 26-year-old former Blackburn Rovers player, who joined Guus Hiddink's team in February, said he was very sorry the whole episode had happened in front of kids in the crowd but he may now be subject to disciplinary action himself.

With the growing influence of black players in Russia, racist chanting has become commonplace at games.

Zenit, Russia's richest club, have never had a black player in their squad and for a long time it has been alleged that the club's owners will do whatever they can to avoid a negative reaction from the fans.

The club's former Dutch coach Dick Advocaat once remarked that he "could not sign a black player without the fans' permission, which was unlikely to ever happen". The irony is that St Petersburg is often called "the cultural capital of Russia", yet Zenit supporters do nothing to hide their unwillingness to "respect diversity" in their team's line-up.

Bananas are not just thrown from the stands in Moscow. Lokomotiv fans gave a notorious send-off to Tashkent-born Nigeria striker Peter Odemwingie when he left the club for England two years ago. A banner showing a banana and the message "Thank you West Bromwich!" was hung from the stands in the game following his departure.

> A Lokomotiv fan threw a banana at Christopher Samba, who hurled it back into the stands and may now face disciplinary action himself

The Russian football authorities tried to turn it into a joke, saying that "banana" stands for "two", a low school mark in kids' slang. However, 30-year-old Odemwingie chose not to return to Moscow despite being offered a salary three times what he was earning at West Brom, whose fans had replied with a "Thank you Lokomotiv!" banner. Odemwingie said that in his three years with the Moscow club, he experienced racist chanting at every game.

Target...Samba (left) challenges Denis Glushakov of Lokomotiv Moscow

Samba case review

In line with UEFA's Euro 2012 anti-racism monitoring campaign, the Russian Premier League's ethics committee will review Samba's case, while the league's security committee is conducting its own investigation. But as international old-timer Vagiz Khidiyatullin, who is now head of the Russian players' union, said, "it would be much easier to stop importing bananas".

Meanwhile Anzhi's appointment of Hiddink as coach – on a reported annual salary of €8.6million, easily the highest in the league – raised many eyebrows.

Hiddink replaced Yuri Krasnozhan, one of the country's most gifted and respected football specialists, who was not given a chance to lead his side in a single official game. If it had been any coach other than Hiddink, the whole thing would have given rise to a tsunami of criticism. Instead, the Dutchman's charisma, along with fond memories of Russia's Euro 2008 campaign, gave an emotional green light to his new venture, enhanced by Hiddink's own kind words about Russia and his pledge to raise a new generation of young Russian players at Anzhi. WS

REX GOWAR

Striking a deal

National championship kicks off in total chaos

Problems...national coach Makarian is worried his players will not be fully fit

San Martin lost 2-0 away to Cienciano in Cuzco on the last weekend of March in their first match of the Descentralizado, a month after the official start of Peru's national championship.

They were back after dropping out of the league in protest at the sorry state of football in the country, where players who were fed up with their clubs owing them months in back pay went on strike.

Most clubs fielded junior teams on the opening weekend of the season, while San Martin, enraged at the situation, did not even bother to field a team at all at Melgar – and lost the points. But they cared little about this minor detail as the board decided that the club, who were one of the few with their books in order and payments up to date, had had enough.

They were angry with the players union for calling a strike, but above all they were furious with the likes of Universitario and Alianza Lima for seeking further refinancing of their huge debts in order to stay in the league.

San Martin, champions three times in the last five years, were also insulted at being called "insignificant" by the presidents of the big clubs, who belittled their contribution to the league because of their very small fan base.

San Martin's withdrawal was accepted by the Asociacion Deportiva de Futbol Profesional, which runs the Descentralizado. Meanwhile, the government stepped in with measures to ensure the indebted clubs were put into temporary administration while others would be closely monitored. The top-flight clubs, $100million in debt according to Peruvian media, owe not only players' wages but also taxes and pension-fund contributions. Universitario president Julio Pacheco was banned for two years after presenting the Peruvian Football Federation with fraudulent papers during an investigation into the club's finances.

> San Martin dropped out in protest at the sorry state of football in the country

This coincided with San Martin's return, having been convinced there were serious efforts at last to clear up some of the many problems in Peruvian football. They were allowed to reschedule matches from the second, third and fourth rounds of the championship.

Biggest victims

Ultimately, the biggest victim of this chaotic start could be the national team, as coach Sergio Markarian prepares for what he considers to be the hardest stretch of the World Cup qualifiers.

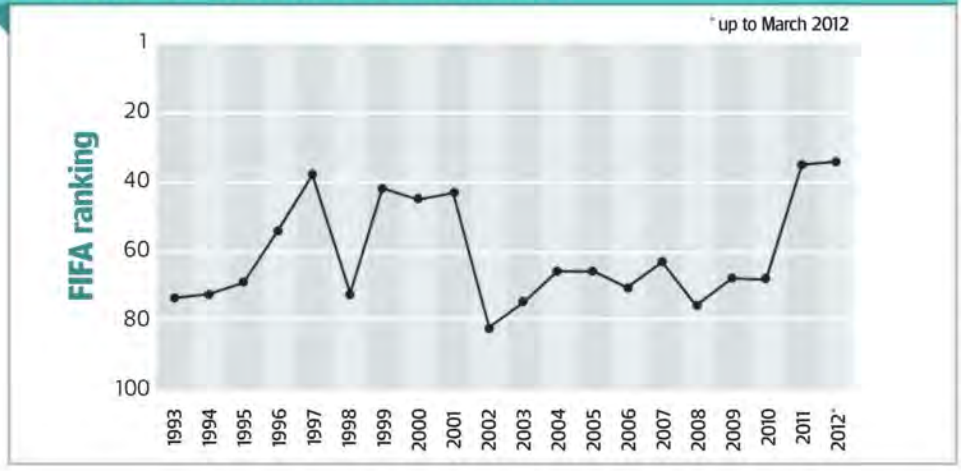
A 3-1 defeat by neighbours Chile in a friendly in March, in which both countries picked only home-based players, merely served to underline the difficulties Markarian faces. As a result of the league chaos, his players were short of match practice, with only a few having played Libertadores Cup games for Juan Aurich and Alianza Lima.

Several San Martin players were also in the squad at a time when they were technically unattached and their lack of match fitness was especially noticeable.

Peru, one from bottom of the South American table with three points from three matches, host Colombia on June 2 before facing Copa America holders Uruguay in Montevideo a week later. They then have home games in the space of four days in September against Venezuela, the continent's most improved team, and Argentina. "These matches will show us where we really are," says Markarian. "It's going to be a very hard test."

When Markarian steered Peru, who have underachieved for years, to a surprise third place at the Copa America last year, it raised hopes they might finally end a World Cup absence dating back to 1982. Now he says: "Everything is very difficult in Peruvian football. We must wait for the waters to calm." WS

PERU'S RISE BACK UP THE WORLD RANKINGS



CAMEROON

JONATHAN WILSON
in Yaounde

Where did it all go wrong?

From continental champions to African Nations Cup non-qualifiers in 10 years

Watching Zambia win the African Nations Cup earlier this year brought Cameroon's own failings into painfully sharp relief. Two years ago they beat Zambia 3-2 in the group phase in Angola and two years before that they beat them 5-1 in Ghana at the same stage. But as Zambia celebrated continental triumph in Libreville in February, Cameroon were at home, having failed to even qualify. In a decade they had gone from retaining the African crown to missing the finals altogether.

"In 2008, it was 5-1, but Zambia played well and gave four goals away," recalls Joseph-Antoine Bell, Cameroon's former goalkeeper who played in three World Cups and is now an eloquent television pundit. "I said: 'Don't just look at the score, look at what happened'. If you played that game two or three times, it wouldn't be 5-1. If we don't watch how games go, we don't see beyond the score. It's the way politicians see football. They just talk about the score and don't look at what happens."

Bell, like many others, blames a culture of complacency, an assumption that, because Cameroon had been one of the pre-eminent sides in Africa since the early 1980s they would continue to be so indefinitely.

"We did not do what was needed to consolidate those achievements," agrees former Cameroon striker Jean Manga-Onguene, African Footballer of the Year in 1980. "We used to have academies across Cameroon where budding young talent could develop. In 1991, 93 and 95 we went round the country prospecting for talent, and at every stage we took the youth teams to join the sides preparing for continental competition. A lot of the players who won the 1995 African Under-21 title in Nigeria went on to the senior team.

"When you're doing well, you tend to stop investing, thinking things will always be the same. Now you have an under-17 team where no one is coming from the under-15s – and that means something is fundamentally wrong."

In August 2010, after a disastrous World Cup in which Cameroon were the first side to be eliminated, Manga-Onguene was appointed the first technical director of the Cameroonian football federation. He has set about establishing a nationwide programme of scouting and coaching, saying: "Too many players have been getting into the national team without having the appropriate training. With proper training, coaches can determine players' weaknesses and try to improve them before they join the first team."

> "We did not do what was necessary to consolidate our achievements"
> Jean Manga-Onguene, the Cameroon football federation's technical director

But there is another problem and it stems from the country's past success.

Because Cameroon were World Cup regulars it was natural for European clubs to focus their scouting there. As more and more players left and rose to a level of true professionalism – not to mention riches beyond the wildest dreams of those left back home – so the sense of a collective was lost.

Money became an increasingly important issue – and the sad truth is that where there is money there is often also corruption.

"There was too much ego, each player trying to justify their role in the team and make money," says Jean-Paul Akono, a former international defender who is now Manga-Onguene's deputy. Both men were part of the true golden era of Cameroonian football, having been involved with the great Canon Yaounde side that won the African Champions Cup in 1978 and 1980.

"The players are not to blame alone for our problems," says Akono. "Ego was not restricted to players but also to team officials, the federation. They have to take part of the blame for thinking the achievements of previous years were a natural phenomenon that would never go away. It took a long time to realise the importance of having a technical manager at the head of the team."

Passionate men

Manga-Onguene and Akono are clearly passionate men and nobody could doubt their commitment to Cameroonian football. But one of their former team-mates doubts they will succeed.

"Our coaches have no professional European experience," says Theophile Abega, who played for Canon Yaounde and Cameroon before joining Toulouse in France. "Even Manga and Akono haven't played in Europe. Manga was a fantastic player but he didn't play professionally. He doesn't know what it is to be a professional. Being professional is in your mentality, in your habits."

Abega is now the mayor of the fourth arrondissement of Yaounde, so perhaps it isn't surprising that he sees a political explanation for Cameroon's woes.

"We have a federation playing politics, not football," he says. "Some delegates are trying just to bring players from the north because they control the federation. You have to pick the best players, wherever they come from, not just to keep each area happy."

Which leads, inevitably, to Samuel Eto'o, whose role in the national side is Cameroonian football's biggest debate.

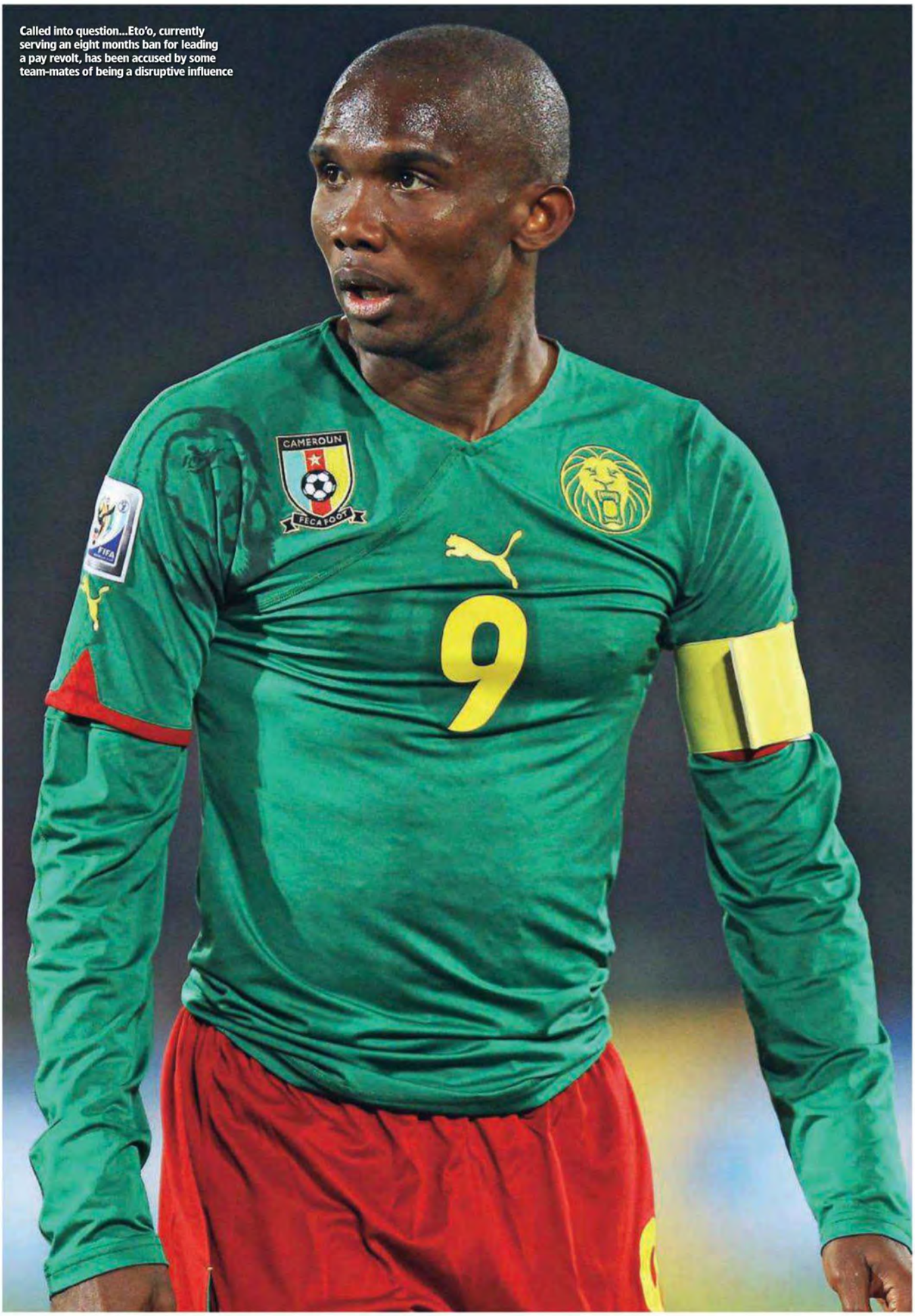
"There is a tactical problem with the disparity of talent between Eto'o and the rest because every other player rushes to give the ball to him whether he's in a good position or not," says Abega.

But for others the issue is not merely the size of his talent but also of his ego. Seasoned internationals Alex Song and Achille Emana were both reportedly furious at the way Eto'o was said to have patronised team-mates, poisoning the atmosphere around the team. Those complaints are academic now, with Eto'o banned for eight months after leading protests against the non-payment of bonuses that caused a friendly against Algeria to be cancelled last November.

Others say the suspension was to curb his influence over the side, while Abega even argues it was an attempt by "forces from the north" to bring fans on to the streets in protest to destabilise the government of Paul Biya, who won a sixth term as president last October.

The real problem, however, is less about Eto'o's talent and personality than the dearth of top-class players that has followed in the 31-year-old's footsteps. That, more than anything, is the issue that Manga-Onguene and Cameroonian football must address. WS

CAMEROON'S AFRICAN NATIONS CUP RECORD



Called into question...Eto'o, currently serving an eight months ban for leading a pay revolt, has been accused by some team-mates of being a disruptive influence

PHILIPPE GERMAIN
in Montreal

Making an Impact

With three teams in MLS, attendance figures in the Great White North are rising

You can blame it on the combination of exceptional distance and low population, but the bottom line is, whatever game they play, Canada's professional sports clubs can't survive in a national league of their own.

Piggybacking on largely American circuits is the norm in Canada and football is no exception. Thirty years ago, Canada had five teams – Calgary Boomers, Edmonton Drillers, Montreal Manic, Toronto Blizzard and Vancouver Whitecaps – in the North American Soccer League, and only in 2012 are we now approaching similar numbers, with a third Canadian entry in Major League Soccer, as Montreal Impact made their debut in the USA's top flight alongside Toronto and Vancouver Whitecaps.

> Montreal's MLS debut against Chicago Fire drew a record crowd for a pro game in the city

And what a debut it was, with 58,914 fans packed into the Olympic Stadium on March 17 to set a new attendance record for a professional football match in the city as Impact drew 1-1 with Chicago Fire thanks to a goal from USA striker Davy Arnaud.

The previous record of 58,542 was established in September 1981 by Montreal Manic, for the NASL play-off game against Chicago Sting, and among the crowd that day was 17-year-old Joey Saputo, the future Impact president. The atmosphere impressed him so much that he asked for Chicago Fire to be the first MLS visitors to Montreal to evoke the memory of that special day.

Special day...a young fan gets in the mood as Impact kick off their MLS season against Chicago

Another record

A week and a half earlier, Toronto set a record of their own as 47,658 – the second-highest in the tournament's history – attended the first leg of the CONCACAF Champions League quarter-final at the Rogers Centre against Los Angeles Galaxy.

This game was presented in the media as a thank-you gift for the Toronto fans after five years of disappointing results since they became the first Canadian entry in MLS. Taking a two-goal lead early in the first half, both set up by former Germany midfielder Torsten Frings, Toronto were hauled back by an equaliser from Landon Donovan in the dying minutes.

A week later, however, Toronto exploited Galaxy's weariness to win 2-1 and become the first Canadian side ever to make it through to the semi-finals, where they will face Mexican powerhouse Santos Laguna.

Although relatively small, the TV ratings for football in Canada have been impressive so far this season, with the MLS season opener between Montreal and Vancouver attracting over half a million viewers, which beats the ratings for UEFA Champions League matches on Canadian TV.

To give this figure further perspective, south of the border during the same weekend the US audience for the Dallas-New York match was under 100,000 – despite the teams being from two of the largest TV markets in a country 10 times more populated than Canada.

Although the latest crowd figures are impressive, attendance marks are still shy of the Canadian record of 60,342 for the inaugural NASL match between Seattle Sounders and Vancouver Whitecaps, set in 1983, and the once-Olympic record of 71,617 who saw the East Germany-Poland Final at the 1976 Summer Games in Montreal.

However, the proximity in time of these two latest marks is a sign of the dawn of another golden era in the professional game in the Great White North. WS

MONTREAL TRIPLE MLS' AVERAGE CROWD

58,914
March 2012
Montreal v Chicago
MLS

Attraction...there was an amazing turnout for Montreal's MLS debut compared to the league's average attendance last year

17,872
Average attendance
MLS 2011

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STEVE MENARY

New board seek local solution

Caribbean island bosses fall out with overseas coaches

English coach Colwyn Rowe quit his job as national coach of Saint Vincent & the Grenadines less than 12 months into a three-year contract after what he felt was too much interference in team affairs by the country's new federation board.

With the 2014 World Cup qualifiers starting last September, and many of the senior national side lacking match practice, Rowe had wanted to use the under-23 team that he took to Surinam in August for the Olympic qualifiers as the core of his squad. However, the newly elected board of the Saint Vincent & the Grenadines Football Federation, and their president Venold Coombs, thought rather differently.

"I left because of the new executive," says Rowe, who is a former coach of Botswana's national team. "We had different views of the way forward."

For the final qualifier, at home to Belize in November, Rowe says that Coombs took it upon himself to add three unknown players - Wesley Charles, Sean Tannis and Shane Glynn – to the squad. However, the coach left the trio on the bench for a 2-0 defeat in what proved to be his final game in charge.

Rowe's experiences are echoed by Saint Vincent's previous overseas coach, fellow Englishman Stewart Hall, who signed a three-year deal in 2008.

"The federation is underfunded, understaffed and has few facilities or equipment," says Hall, who left his role after only six months and just 10 games in charge. "Most pitches are cricket pitches and have a raised square marked in the middle.

"Everybody knows everything but nobody does anything. If you organise national training, half the players don't turn up. If you organise a coaches' event the coaches don't turn up. But they all want to work in the programme.

"The local answer to everything is 'we have talent', but in my opinion not enough...and no discipline, concentration or focus.

"My philosophy was to replace all senior players with under-20s and under-17s and work on their attitude. However, the locals and media, and even some football people, still thought they should qualify for the World Cup."

> "The local answer is 'we have talent' but in my opinion not enough"
> Former coach Stewart Hall

New hope...skipper Samuel (back row, left) believes the national side are on the way back

Renewed optimism

Saint Vincent did reach the 1995 Caribbean Cup Final, only to lose 5-0 to Trinidad & Tobago. That was enough to secure qualification for the 1996 Gold Cup, but they were whitewashed at the tournament in the USA and have not come close to qualifying since.

Now this summer's Caribbean Cup in Antigua & Barbuda offers another chance at qualification. Ex-national team captain Cornelius Huggins has replaced Rowe and started his new job with a 1-0 win over an inexperienced Guyana XI – a result that leaves striker Shandel Samuel optimistic about his country's chances.

"Foreign coaches are OK, but it depends on their attitude," says Samuel, who has taken over from Huggins as skipper. "Cornelius knows the players best. He'll get the best out of them." WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD

Saint Vincent is the country's largest island. The Grenadines are a group of smaller islands lying to the south.

Population 103,500
Size 150 sq m **Capital** Kingstown
Language English, French patois
Religion mainly Protestant

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JAMES MONTAGUE
in Kiryat Shmona

Dreaming of the promised land

A team from a tiny war-torn city has its sights set on the Champions League

There was a time – somewhere between the day the rockets stopped falling and the start of the current football season – when the residents of Kiryat Shmona could enjoy the sabbath in peace. But not any longer.

It's Saturday and outside the 5,300-capacity Ironi Stadium members of the Blue Lions – the ultras supporters of Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona – gather before a game against Hapoel Ironi Nir Ramat HaSharon.

"Today it's like a dream," explains Almorg Moryoussef, a 23-year-old student. "This is the very first time since Kiryat Shmona was established that the city was in the news not because of the connection with missiles, attacks and war but football."

The dream Moryoussef speaks of is the Israeli Premier League – and Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona were top, 17 points clear of second-place Hapoel Tel Aviv, when it split in two in March.

With a population of just over 20,000 the city is out on a limb and down on its luck. Less than two miles from the Lebanese border, the city is infamous for bearing the brunt of Hezbollah's intermittent Katyusha rocket attacks. More than 800 fell here during the 2006 Lebanon War and, with poverty rife, the city has been heavily depopulated since.

A few years ago Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona did not even exist, but now the team is on course for a first league title and a place in next season's UEFA Champions League, alongside the likes of Manchester United, Barcelona and Real Madrid, as one the smallest sides ever to qualify for the competition. But the club's recent success has done far more than just shake up a league usually dominated by big-budget teams from Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa; it has also given a city that has felt marginalised and neglected a sense of pride and a reason to hope.

Dramatic rise

The team was only formed 10 years ago and its dramatic rise can largely be traced back to one man: Israeli businessman Izzy Sheratzky, a technology millionaire from Tel Aviv. He began investing heavily in the city after seeing images of Kiryat Shmona being pounded by Katyushas 13 years ago. Eventually he decided to buy two local clubs and merge them together with the dream of taking his new team to the Champions League.

"In 1999 I saw the wars, the Katyushas and many bombs. A few people died and many people left Kiryat Shmona," says Sheratzky, sitting in his office an hour before kick-off with one eye on a plasma screen showing another Israeli league match. "The situation was very bad. There was no work and there were the bombs. I decided to take care of the city and to help the people."

At first Sheratzky took care of the city's immediate needs: a soup kitchen for the poor, a children's dental surgery, an English language school. But he soon realised that the city's residents needed something bigger to take their minds off the troubles, so bought the two teams: one of which was in Israel's fourth division, the other in the fifth tier.

"We were 11th in the fourth league and now I hope we take the championship. And maybe next year I am coming to London for the Champions League," laughs Sheratzky.

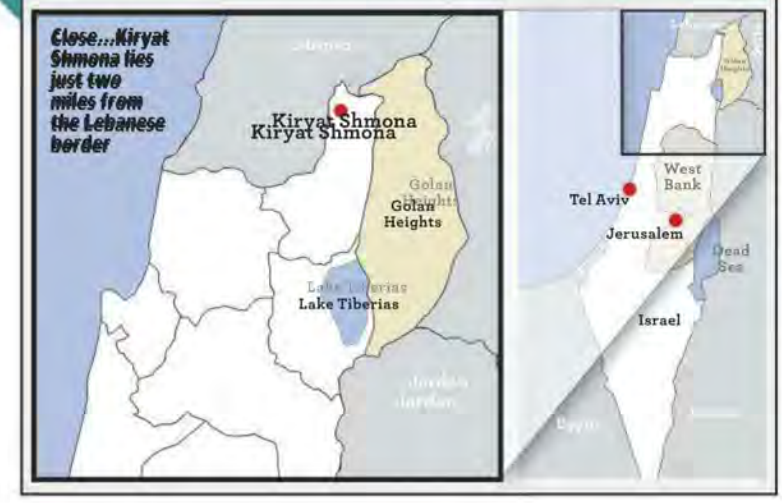
When he first came on the scene the players thought that his talk of rising through the divisions and of one day winning the league was deluded, another example of an out-of-towner seduced by the city's misery in times of war who then leaves when the TV crews and journalists head for the front line.

"Izzy came here when I was a player and said we'll be in the national league, that we'd be champions and after that be in the Champions League," says Yossi Edri, the club's sporting director. "I thought, who is this man? We thought he was cuckoo."

But as the team rose steadily

Young lions... Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona's rise to the top has proved a welcome distraction from conflict for their band of passionate supporters

A CITY LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF CONFLICT



through the divisions – not by spending big money but by investing in an academy to nurture young players – Sheratzky's crazy dream started to look like a reality. Last year the club won its first-ever piece of silverware: the Toto Cup, which is Israel's equivalent of the League Cup.

Peaceful mix

The team's success has been felt far outside the city, and Edri says: "We are not just for Kiryat Shmona, we are for the whole Galil [Israel's northern Galilee region]. We are a mix, half of the team is Arabic. For us this is very important. With football you can do peace, the Arab and Israeli [Jews] living together.

"Izzy is a very special man. If it wasn't for him we wouldn't be here speaking now."

By the time the referee blows his whistle to start the match against Hapoel Ironi Nir Ramat HaSharon, around 2,000 fans have arrived to cheer on their team, despite the biting cold. Sheratzky watches the match unfold smoking a Cuban cigar as the Blue Lions chant: "Kiryat Shmona, the Empire of the North." The hosts prove too good and they thrash Ramat HaSharon 4-0.

> "Izzy came here and said that we'd be in the Champions League. We thought he was cuckoo"
>
> Yossi Edri, Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona sporting director

"In the last eight years it has changed since Izzy came to this city and brought this team up, we came from nowhere," says Eliyahu Vernin, a 35-year-old goldsmith sitting in the stands who was born in Kiryat Shmona and hopes to make the team's commemorative gold rings to mark their first league title.

"This team is [worth] 14 million shekels [£2.3million). Hapoel Tel Aviv is 100m shekels [£16.6m].

"But it is not just the money. It is the idea that Izzy came with. He wanted to change everything and built little by little.

"Nobody actually believes what they see. It is a very tough city, a small city. A lot of people here are religious and don't come for the games with sabbath. Now, today, they do it a little later, so you see all the people coming in now."

Sure enough, the crowd swells as the night draws in, eventually attracting 3,500 fans – which is about 20 per cent of the city's population. As soon as the full-time whistle blows the team link arms and run towards the stand where the Blue Lions, who have sung continuously throughout the whole match, bow in appreciation.

So too does Ran Ben Shimon, the 41-year old former Israel defender who has coached the team for six years.

"We have spirit, the belief that no one is bigger than this game and that everything is achievable," explains Shimon. "Money is a very important thing in our era. But the most important thing is soul. Connect them and you make the players believe.

"Sometimes when we played the big teams we would be shaking. We would need diapers. But I have smart players. Not only are stars found in the sky, they are also found in groups. So the big superstar in this club is the team and the team spirit.

"You can not allow us to rely on abilities of individual players."

The Blue Lions eventually pack up their drums and roll up their banners, one of which reads: "You Are The Team of My Life; The Light Of My Eyes."

Sheratzky stands on the pitch and watches as the floodlights are turned off one by one. "Look, over there is Lebanon, over there is the Golan," he says, pointing at the dark hills that rise around the stadium, highlighting the city's precarious geography.

"[There is] no cinema here, they all closed. But football is enjoyed by the people. All the people come here and are happy only through football."

Cup success

Three days later the Blue Lions make the long journey south to the outskirts of Tel Aviv for the Toto Cup Final. The competition may be disparaged by many Israeli journalists, but that doesn't matter to Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona. They win a tightly fought match against Hapoel Tel Aviv on penalties to lift the trophy for a second successive season. Now the focus is on the league and what could potentially be an incredible foray in to the Champions League.

In the stands, Almorg Moryoussef, the student from outside the Ironi Stadium a few days earlier, watches as the cup is presented to the club's owner.

"This is my dream," he says, beaming. "Izzy Sheratzky is right. We are only happy through football." WS

PLAYER Biography

David Silva

Key man...Silva weaves his magic during a Euro 2012 qualifier against Scotland

The Manchester City star was the forgotten man of the 2010 World Cup, but he is likely to play a far more important role at Euro 2012. By Sid Lowe

Pepe Reina took the microphone and ran through the Spain team one by one. Introducing them to the crowd, as if the world champions needed any introduction, he strode across the stage in the heart of Madrid, the seleccion's very own MC.

"Wearing 21," the goalkeeper announced, "all the way from the Canary Islands, with his little Samba, with his *guasa* [humour], with his art. He goes this way, he goes that way. He feints. Yes, no. I'm going to score, catch me if you can. The Pony, measuring 1m 40 [4ft 6in]...David Silva!"

Silva stepped forward to a huge cheer. It was quite an introduction. It was also the biggest party the country had ever seen. But Silva wasn't really enjoying himself – not as much as he should have done. Yes, he was smiling; and singing too, leaping up and down with his team-mates. Yes, he was celebrating. But deep down something was missing. Spain had won the 2010 World Cup. Silva, on the other hand, felt like he had not. He didn't feel part of it. And a year later, he still wouldn't.

When Silva was 23, the former Spain coach Luis Aragones described him as "the future of the national team", while current Spain boss Vicente Del Bosque singled him out as a candidate for the world player of the year awards. But by the time the 2010 World Cup came round, Del Bosque appeared to have singled him out in a very different way. Silva had played the first game of the tournament, against Switzerland – the only game that Spain lost – but after that he played just four more minutes in the competition. Spain had won the World Cup without him.

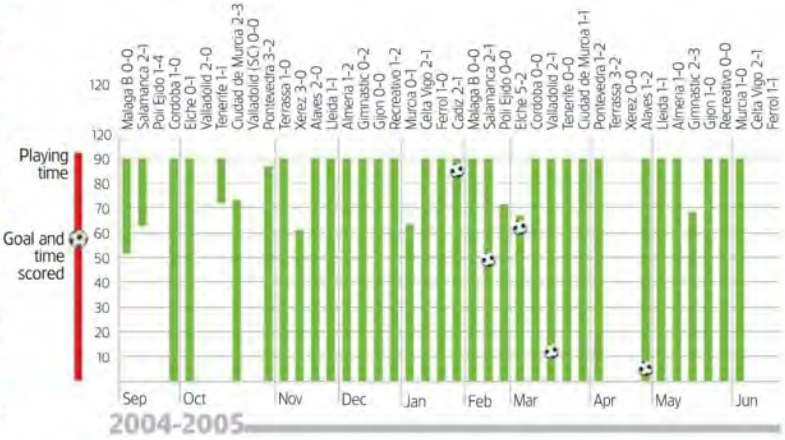
A tactical shift from one deep-lying midfielder to two – Sergio Busquets and Xabi Alonso playing together in the space once occupied by Marcos Senna alone – meant one place fewer for that

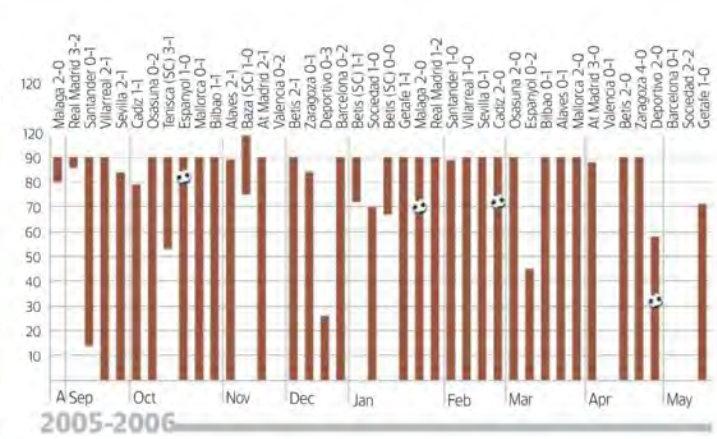
TIMELINE: EVERY MATCH, EVERY MINUTE, EVERY GOAL

KEY

WC	World Cup qualifier	**UC**	UEFA Cup/Europa League
WCF	World Cup Finals	**SC**	Spanish Cup
EC	Euro Championship qualifier	**SSC**	Spanish Super Cup
ECF	Euro Championship Finals	**EC**	English FA Cup
CON	Confederations Cup	**ELC**	English League Cup
CL	Champions League	**ECS**	English Community Shield

Oct 23, 2005 – celebrates after scoring his first goal for Celta Vigo, in a La Liga win at home to Espanyol

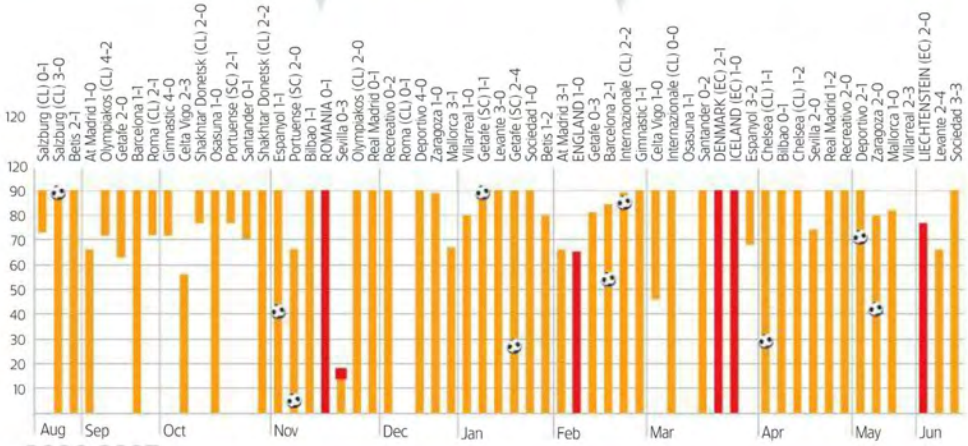


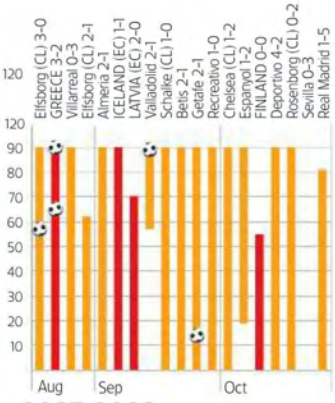


KEY Eibar Celta Vigo Valencia Manchester City Spain

Nov 15, 2006 – makes his international debut in a friendly against Romania in Cadiz

Feb 21, 2007 – scores a late equaliser away to Internazionale in the Champions League





FACT FILE

David Josue Jimenez Silva

Nationality
Spanish

Age
26 (08.01.86)

Place of birth
Arguineguin, Canary Islands, Spain

Height
5ft 7in (1.70m)

Position
Attacking midfielder

Teams
Valencia
2004-10 (168 games/33 goals)

Eibar (on loan)
2004-05 (35 games/4 goals)

Celta Vigo (on loan)
2005-06 (38 games/3 goals)

Manchester City
2010-present (94 games/13 goals)*

Spain
2006-present (55 games/15 goals)*

Honours
Valencia
Spanish Cup 2008

Manchester City
FA Cup 2011

Spain
World Cup 2010, European Championship 2008

** up to & inc 23.03.12*

Forgotten man...Silva (left) spent the majority of the 2010 World Cup on the substitutes' bench

creative gang of Spanish little men. Ultimately, it meant no place for Silva.

But another tactical shift, a little over a year later, might mean there is now a place for him after all. It might mean a starring role as "Spain's Leo Messi" at this summer's European Championship.

Silva's memories of the last European Championship are better than those of the World Cup. Under coach Aragones, he had been a key part of the side that finally won an international tournament for Spain, 44 years after they were first crowned champions of Europe. Cutting in from the left as part of a front three, the playmaker gave Spain something a little different, that touch of fantasy and flair. Against Russia in the semi-finals, he had been especially impressive.

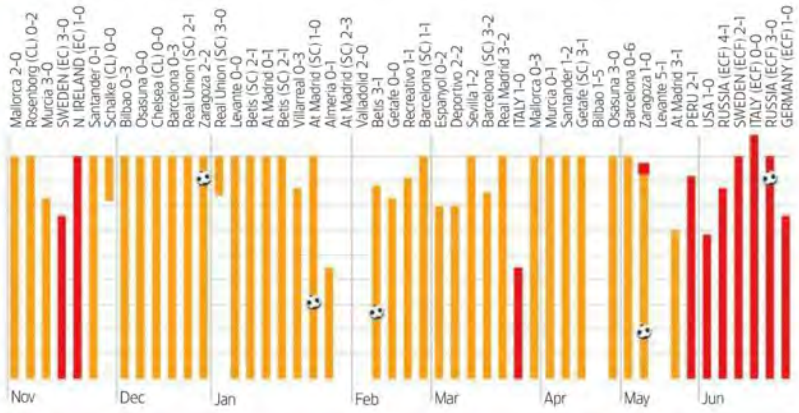
Grand Canarian

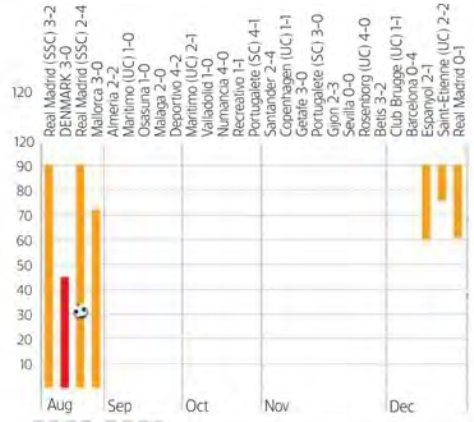
Silva was born in Arguineguin in the Canary Islands – the same town as the slow-motion creative fulcrum of that great Deportivo La Coruna team, Juan Carlos Valeron. Originally a fishing village on the south shoreline of Gran Canaria, over 600 miles from the mainland, even the transformation of tourism has not seen the town's population go beyond 7,000. Yet, astonishingly, it has produced two of the most talented Spanish attacking playmakers in over a decade.

> Silva gave the Spanish that touch of fantasy and flair

Silva's father played regional football on Gran Canaria with a young Valeron and made quite an impact on Silva as a boy – a wayward shot once broke an arm of his watching son. So did the island. Silva is the embodiment of the Canarian footballer: players who are looked upon as Spain's Brazilians;

Jun 29, 2008 – helps beat Germany in the European Championship Final as Spain win their first major international trophy for 44 years





KEY Eibar Celta Vigo Valencia Manchester City Spain

Special skills...Silva runs at Russia's defence during the Euro 2008 semis

Team talk...Silva has struggled to hold down a regular starting spot under Spain coach Del Bosque

players of touch, technique and skill, of creativity and fantasy. Silva is all of that, for sure, yet one of the phrases that most helps to explain his success is the one that Aragones threw his way when he first joined up with the Spain squad.

"You're not *Canario*," Aragones shouted at him during one session, "you're Basque."

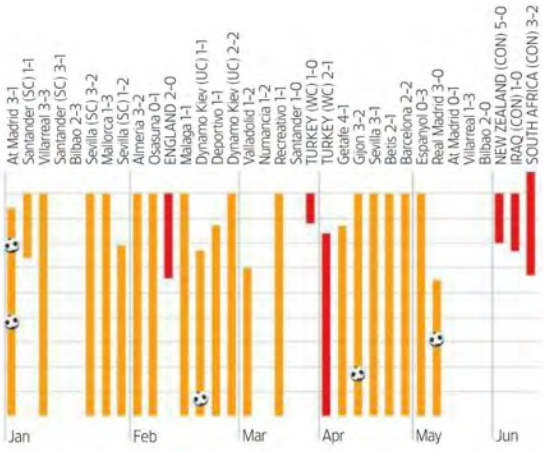
If Canary Islanders are all flitting movement and fantasy skills, the stereotypical image of the Basque player could not be more different. They are the warriors, the battlers of the Spanish game, the Englishmen.

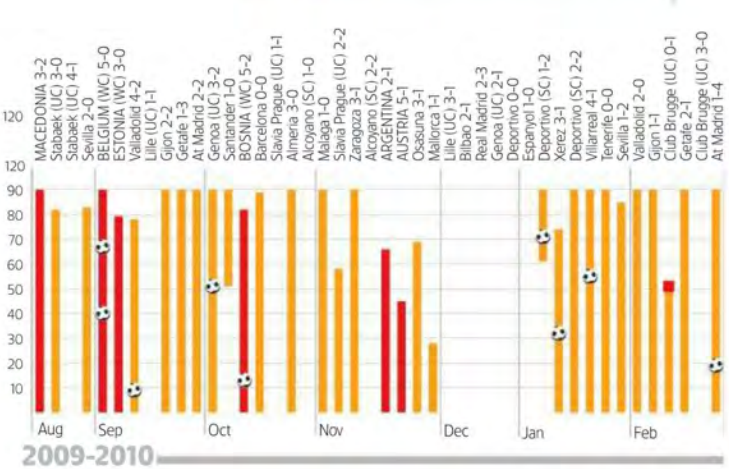
Aragones had a point. Silva joined Valencia as a kid, his father travelling to the mainland with him, and just before making the breakthrough he went on loan to second division Eibar – the classic Basque club. His coach, Jose Luis Mendilibar, who is now at Osasuna, recalls a player who never hid and never

High flyer...Silva in action during his loan spell with Celta Vigo

Swiss surprise...Silva's only start at the 2012 World Cup was in their shock 1-0 defeat to Switzerland

Feb 18, 2010 – sent off in the Europa League game away to Club Brugge. It was his third red card while at Valencia





backed down. One of his team-mates at Celta Vigo, the next club he was loaned to, calls him "a tough little so and so". Extremely quiet off the pitch, he fights and battles on it. "Silva," Aragones said, "has the most balls in the national team". Talent and temperament did not have to be mutually exclusive. England later proved that, as any doubts that Silva could cope with the pace and physicality of the Premier League were blown away.

He was still a playmaker, though. But when the 2010 World Cup came round, Marcos Senna was not around, and the new Spain boss, Del Bosque, sought a little more protection. By adding a deep midfielder and pushing Xavi higher up the pitch, he lost one of his creative players. He lost Silva. And although he kept getting in the squad, he rarely played after the tournament either.

It did not matter that Silva had performed impressively since moving to Manchester City, he no longer appeared to be a central part of Spain's plans. Even his fantastic start to this season was not making an impact; he was the Premier League's best player but he could not get in the Spain team.

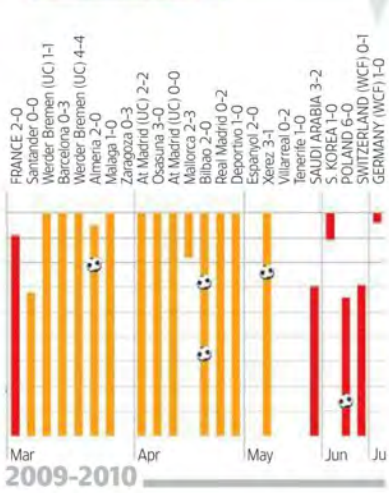
Del Bosque insisted that he was following Silva's progress – and the Canary Islander continued to be included in every squad, even getting the occasional goal – but he had not been to England to see him.

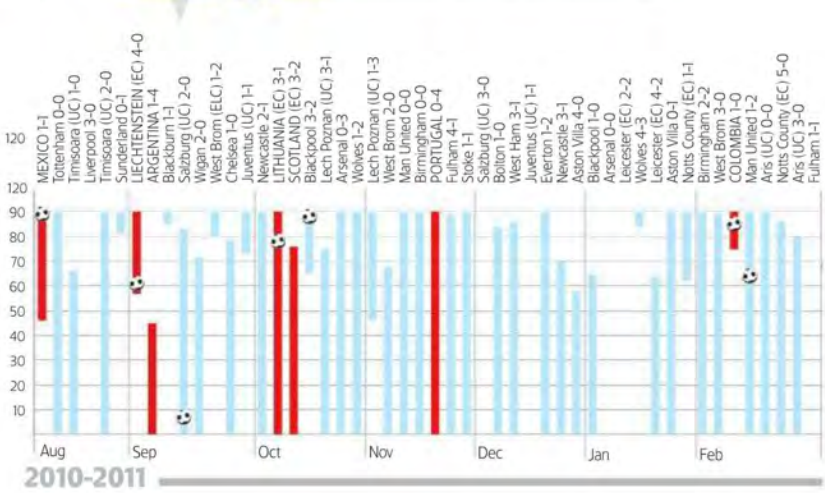
By October 2011, Silva's father expressed his growing frustration. His son had been consistently superb for Manchester City yet consistently left on

Opposite sides...Silva gets the better of his Manchester City team-mate Joleon Lescott during Spain's friendly with England

Jul 11, 2010 – collects a World Cup winners medal despite playing just 94 minutes in the tournament

Sep 16, 2010 – scores his first goal for Manchester City, away to Salzburg in the Europa League





KEY Eibar Celta Vigo Valencia Manchester City Spain

Top dog...Silva's form this season has helped turn Manchester City into genuine Premier League contenders

the bench for the national team. "David does not know what he has to do to get in the team," he said. Silva even broke from his normal noncommittal approach to interviews to speak out, admitting that he felt "forgotten".

Coming in from the cold

Silva may have been playing brilliantly, but Spain were hardly short of great players and they had won the World Cup without him.

Helping City win 6-1 at Old Trafford certainly did his prospects no harm; neither did Champions League football, no matter how fleeting. However, it was Silva's shift from the flank to a more central role that finally made the case for his inclusion in the national side

> "He has the most balls in the national team" Former Spain coach Luis Aragones

impossible for Del Bosque to ignore any longer.

Playing with greater freedom meant he contributed more assists, more goals and more key passes. Prompted by David Villa's injury and Fernando Torres' drop in form, Del Bosque found a role for City's playmaker. There was a difference, though. While City's Silva dropped deep, starting as well as finishing moves, and often receiving possession behind Yaya Toure rather than in front of him, Del Bosque pushed Spain's Silva higher. Much higher.

Against Scotland in November 2011, the coach played Silva in the position known as the "false number nine". Silva scored twice and set up one. Against England, Del Bosque opted for a similar approach. Spain didn't win this time, but the coach expressed satisfaction with their degree of control.

Against Venezuela, Spain's last major friendly before this summer's Euro squad is announced, Silva scored another wonderful goal and was at the heart of an astonishing first-half performance. This time he was coming in from the left, but his case for regular inclusion had been made – and made forcibly.

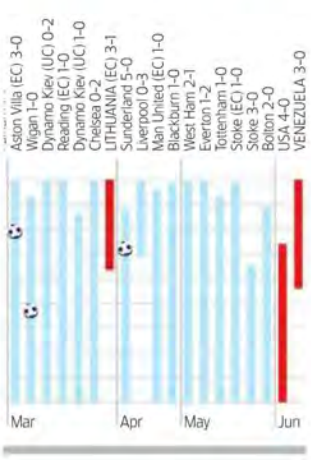
A tactical shift once took Silva out of the team; now a tactical shift had put him back in. The world and European champions had found a place for him, going this way and that, feinting and faking, yes, no, catch me if you can.

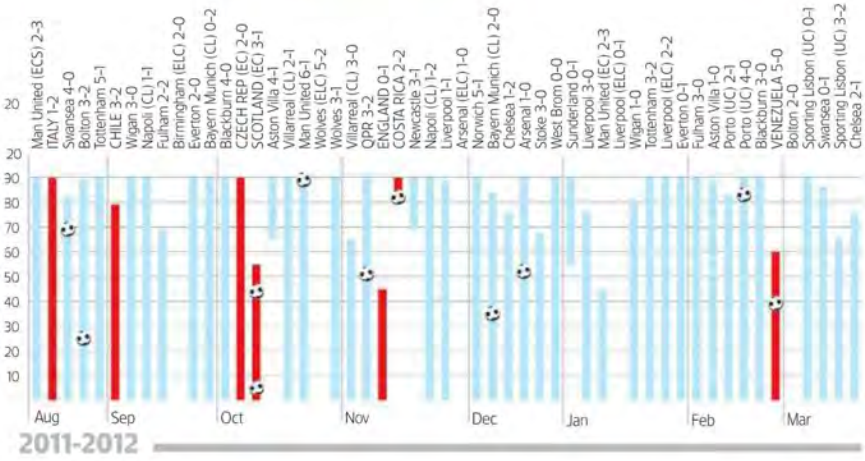
With his little Samba and his art, David Silva is forgotten no more. **WS**

At the double...Silva celebrates his second goal in a 3-1 win over Scotland

May 14, 2011 – helps Manchester City to win the FA Cup at Wembley

Oct 23, 2011 – scores at Old Trafford to put the icing on the cake of a resounding 6-1 win at neighbours Manchester United





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ClubFocus

BOCA JUNIORS

Libertadores obsession

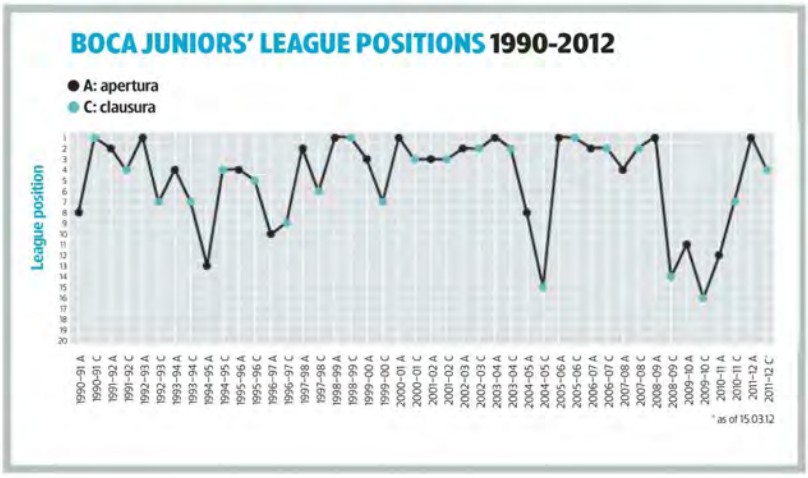
The Buenos Aires giants yearn for continental glory, while trying to build for the future. **Joel Richards** reports

"Y*dale alegria, alegria mi corazon, la Copa Libertadores mi obsession*," chant Boca's supporters before the game with Brazil's Fluminense in March. And if there is one competition that has come to define Boca Juniors, it is the Libertadores Cup. Nearly three years since their last match in the competition at La Bombonera – a defeat by Defensor Sporting of Uruguay in May 2009 – ***Los Xeneizes*** (the Genoans) were back and enjoying the occasion.

The runaway Argentinian champions were confident. The club announced record gate receipts of £580,000 for the match and the team would run out in front of a packed stadium.

A few miles north, meanwhile, former Pink Floyd lyricist Roger Waters played The Wall at River Plate's Monumental stadium. The comparison is more than anecdotal; it has long been the subject of crossfire between the fans. In 2006 Boca plastered the city centre with posters. In blue, the trophies: "Boca: Apertura 2005, Sudamericana 2005, Recopa 2005, Clausura 2006, Recopa 2006." In red: "River: The Rolling Stones, Robbie Williams, Shakira, Chayanne, U2." The message was simple. Foreign headline acts play at River; Boca play Finals.

The 2000s were Boca's decade with the club winning 16 trophies, including five league titles, four Libertadores Cups, ▶



Fanatical...Boca supporters at La Bombonera

URUGUAY
SEGUROS
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Champions...Boca fans celebrate last year's apertura title success

Crushed...Cristian Erbes (left) and Boca were beaten 5-4 at home by Independiente in March

> "We made La Bombonera a stadium that everyone wanted to go to"
> Former Boca president, Mauricio Macri

two Intercontinental Cups, two Sudamericana Cups and three South American Super Cups. Carlos Bianchi was the architect of the success, repeating his 1990s success with Velez Sarsfield at Boca. *El Virrey* (the viceroy) coached sides that won three out of four Libertadores, both Intercontinental cups and four league titles.

Hero...Tevez lifts the Libertadores in 2003

Decline inevitable

Yet after such a sustained run of success, a decline was inevitable. In 2008 Boca defeated Tigre and San Lorenzo in a historic three-way play-off for the league title, crowning a year in which they also won the Sudamericana. Then there was nothing until December last year, when Boca lifted the apertura trophy. The three-year drought felt like an eternity.

The peaks and troughs in Boca's success trace neatly over the club's political landscape. To this day the panorama hinges on the club presidential elections in 1995 when Mauricio Macri, son of a powerful businessman, took over as president. "We made a 180-degree turn at the club," Macri later told Martin Caparros for the journalist's book about the club he supports, *Boquita*. "We made it a fashionable stadium that everyone wanted to go to," he added, admitting that River Plate overshadowed Boca when he took over as a 36-year old.

Macri's vision was lifted from several models in Europe. Under his presidency they modernised the club's installations, built a museum and expanded the marketing department. Macri dreamed of a side with nine youth-team products in the starting XI and brought in "baby football" scout and coach Ramon Maddoni, together with legendary youth-team coach Jorge Griffa to oversee the junior sides. The likes of Carlos Tevez, Fernando Gago, Nicolas Burdisso and Sebastian Battaglia soon graduated. To speed up the process, the club spent nearly £2million on a group of teenagers, including nine from Argentinos Juniors, among whom Juan Roman Riquelme stood out.

Macri, meanwhile, fronted millions of pounds for an investment fund that enabled the club to sign the Barros Schelotto twins, Martin Palermo and Jorge Bermudez, among many others. To secure the signature of Walter Samuel from Newell's Old Boys, Macri drove four hours to Rosario after a midweek meeting at the Argentinian FA with his opposite

THE POWER CURVE

The key figures behind Boca Juniors

DANIEL ANGELICI

Current club president who is starting a four-year term with strong backing on the board.

JUAN ROMAN RIQUELME

Pulls the strings on the pitch – and off it too.

MAURICIO MACRI

Now concentrating on city and, increasingly, national politics, his face is still alongside Angelici's on the "Dale Boca" political website.

CARLOS BIANCHI

Constantly linked with a return to the dugout, his opinion is still highly regarded at the club.

MARTIN PALERMO

Since retiring *El Titan* may have lost ground at the club but he continues to be an important figure. Seen as a future coach.

Divided...Palermo (left) and Riquelme

Best bar none...victory over Banfield clinched the 2011 apertura

number, Eduardo Lopez, to make sure the centre-back joined. Samuel played over 120 games for Boca, and the club sold him to Roma, making a vast profit from the £13m transfer.

When Macri took over, Boca had won just one league title since 1981 – the 1992 apertura. (The club count the 1991 clausura, but the title is not recognised by the Argentinian FA as it came in the year of the transition to the short-season format of apertura and clausura. As an exception that year the two champions played a title decider and Marcelo Bielsa's Newell's Old Boys won.) Although Macri would have to wait until 1998 to see the first silverware under his presidency, it was the first of 16. But his ambitions were greater than professional football and in 2007 he moved from La Bombonera to city hall, becoming Buenos Aires mayor.

Vice-president Pedro Pompilio took over, but passed away in October 2008 after a heart attack. As those at the club admit, there was a power vacuum. Jorge Ameal took over the presidency, but he was soon fending off fierce struggles both in the boardroom and on the pitch.

Under Ameal, Boca changed coach on seven occasions between 2008 and 2011. Alfio Basile replaced the incumbent Carlos Ischia, but lasted only seven months, while Claudio Borghi was coach for just 14 matches. "Coaching Boca is like having sex with the windows open," Borghi complained. "There's no intimacy."

Before Julio Falcioni was appointed in 2011, both Abel Alves and Roberto Pompei took charge for two separate interim spells. Alves' second spell left the club with its worst-ever league campaign in the short-season format – 16th with just 20 points from 19 games – while Pompei decided to leave for Huracan when the opportunity arose.

Under Ameal, Bianchi returned to the club but in a strictly managerial role. At the press conference where journalists applauded as he entered, and in which he explained his new role, he stipulated he would not be involved in coaching or picking the team. Few Argentinian clubs employ the system of a manager or sporting director and the experiment failed. Bianchi was never comfortable and, together with Basile, left after barely seven months.

Cold war

Dominating column inches, however, was the cold war between Palermo and Riquelme, which divided the dressing room. Respectively, they are the club's all-time top goalscorer and all-time idol. It was no secret that the two did not see eye-to-eye and there were few more eloquent illustrations of the relationship than when Palermo scored his 219th goal for the club, against Arsenal de Sarandi, to break Roberto Cherro's club record. Riquelme, who laid on the goal for Palermo, wheeled away in the opposite direction. "All that brings us together is playing on Sunday in the same shirt," Palermo said afterwards.

The situation reached the boardroom. While Palermo was close to retirement, the board was heavily split over Riquelme's contract renewal. Ameal pushed for four years and ended up casting the deciding vote to approve the deal with the playmaker. The club treasurer, Daniel Angelici, meanwhile, opposed the contract and quit his position on the board.

Last December, Ameal lost the presidential elections, on the same day that Boca won the apertura 2011 and qualified for the Libertadores Cup for the first time in two years.

Daniel Angelici won with 55 per cent of the vote and took over a club with a championship-winning team; one that had ended 12 points ahead of their nearest rivals, and also finished the campaign undefeated. A month before winning the elections, his predecessor had announced a record £7m profit. He also had Riquelme on a contract far longer than he would have hoped for.

Having held on to the title-winning squad, this year's Libertadores Cup is the priority. But a dreadful 0-0 draw with Zamora in Venezuela set off the first whirlwind of Angelici's presidency.

A dressing-room argument, including coach Falcioni blaming Riquelme for tactical decisions and players closing rank behind the No 10, filtered through to the media. There were reports Falcioni had quit, but what appeared to be an unsustainable situation was brushed aside. Neither he nor the squad talked about what happened.

But the return of the Libertadores to

PROFIT AND LOSS

£7.16m
Profit in 2011

-£3.37m
Deficit in March 2012

TRANSFER MONEY NEEDED

Jorge Ameal announced a £7.16 million annual profit two months before stepping down in December 2011. The following March Boca announced they must recoup at least £3 million in transfers to cover costs, with the club £3.37 million in the red. The club announced they are trying to reduce the annual deficit, covered by player sales, from the recent £6.2m to £4.5m

The Barcelona deal may have improved the club's youth system at no extra cost, beyond future percentages of player transfers, but it added £18,700 to monthly running costs.

La Bombonera did not go to plan, either. Deco and Fred scored for the Brazilians to take the three points and end Boca's impressive 36-game unbeaten run. The following weekend, also at La Bombonera, bottom of the table Independiente won 5-4 amid tactical anarchy. Now the 33-game unbeaten run in the league had also gone. More worringly, in one game Boca conceded five goals. In the entire apertura season – 19 games – they had conceded six.

The possibility of reaching the 40-match unbeaten run put together under Bianchi was gone. But beyond the number-crunching, wider problems cropped up. Falcioni's conservative style had never sat well next to the club's key player, Riquelme, nor did it appear to benefit him. And even though the squad had won last year's championship by a big margin, were they good enough to challenge in the Libertadores?

Football is for chancers

While Boca have retained most of last year's squad, only Santiago Silva joined. Falcioni pushed for the club to bring the striker back to Argentina from Fiorentina where he was struggling. But, having already played for Velez, Silva would only be able to play in the Libertadores. Boca pushed for an exception to be made, with vice-president Juan Carlos Crespi commenting "football is for chancers" after they were granted special permission to field Silva in the league. Velez were livid.

While the defeat by Independiente is viewed merely as a blip, at the club they are attempting to play down expectations. Angelici told sports daily *Ole*: "Boca has more chance of winning the league title than it does of winning the Libertadores." It was not what supporters were hoping to hear.

Elsewhere, there are changes ahead. The youth system is being revamped, after Boca signed a new deal with Barcelona.

Capitalising on the Catalans' decision to close their academy in Argentina, Angelici drafted in Jorge Raffo, who had directed Barca's academy. Former Boca right-back Hugo Ibarra also joined the project. While Boca receive the first-rate installations that Barcelona built, as well as 39 players from the academy, Barcelona retain first option to buy those players, as well as percentages of future sales. If a transfer goes through while a player is under 20, Barcelona take 30 per cent, while that drops to 20 per cent once the player is over 20.

With fallout rates being what they are, the probability of more than a handful of the players Boca have taken on running out at Camp Nou is low. Yet underlying the deal, from Boca's view, is a project that will unify the style of play across all its youth teams.

Just as Macri did, Angelici has made a bold move in the organisation of the youth system early on in his presidency. If the future results – both on the pitch and in the books – are anywhere near those produced by Macri's move, this deal will be seen as a masterstroke. WS

THE SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

1 Agustin ORION

Age 30 (26.06.81)
Thirteen consecutive clean sheets helped Boca to the 2011 apertura title and earned him the league record for the least number of goals conceded in a championship.

13 Sebastian SOSA (Uru)

Age 25 (19.08.86)
A highly rated back-up, the former Penarol man is being forced to wait his turn on the bench.

DEFENDERS

6 Matias CARUZZO

Age 27 (15.08.84)
Title-winning captain at Argentinos Juniors, the centre-back followed Borghi to Boca but has now dropped down the pecking order.

29 Juan INSAURRALDE

Age 27 (03.10.84)
An uncompromising centre-back, brought in by Claudio Borghi from Newell's Old Boys.

3 Clemente RODRIGUEZ

Age 30 (31.07.81)
Tireless left-back, who likes to go forward, he is now in his third spell at the club. Close friends with Riquelme off the pitch.

MIDFIELDERS

21 Cristian CHAVEZ

Age 25 (16.06.86)
Attack-minded former youth-team graduate who filled in when Riquelme was injured last year.

22 Cristian ERBES

Age 22 (06.01.90)
Central midfielder, promoted from the youth system, who has yet to establish himself.

11 Walter ERVITI

Age 31 (12.06.80)
A champion under Falcioni at Banfield, he swapped the left side of midfield for a deeper position and has since continued that role at Boca.

FORWARDS

24 Sergio ARAUJO

Age 20 (28.01.92)
Linked with Barcelona in the past, he has been a regular in Argentina's age-group sides.

17 Nicolas BLANDI

Age 22 (31.01.90)
Scored some vital goals in the apertura triumph, but his first-team chances have been limited.

20 Dario CVITANICH

Age 27 (16.05.84)
On loan from Dutch side Ajax, he was the club's top scorer in the 2011 apertura with five goals in 12 starts.

Home kit

Second kit

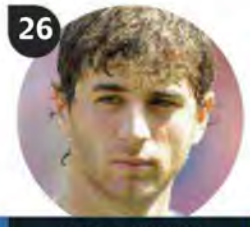
Third kit

THE COACH

JULIO FALCIONI

Age 55 (20.07.56)
With a serious, well-organised and conservative tactical approach, the former goalkeeper won his second title as a coach in his first year at Boca. Started his coaching career at Velez Sarsfield, then had spells at Olimpo, Banfield, Independiente, Colon and Gimnasia De la Plata before a return to Banfield, where he won the 2009 apertura.

Facundo RONCAGLIA
Age 24 (02.10.87)
Versatile defender with experience in Europe who has settled into the side at right-back during Franco Sosa's injury.



Gaston SAURO
Age 22 (23.02.90)
Highly rated centre-back who has been promoted to the first-team squad from the juniors.

Rolando SCHIAVI
Age 39 (18.01.73)
The veteran centre-back still commands the back line and was one of the key players in last year's apertura success.

Franco SOSA
Age 31 (04.04.81)
Signed by Falcioni as first choice on the right side of the back line but has been unlucky with injury since arriving from Lorient.

Pablo LEDESMA
Age 28 (04.02.84)
Right-sided midfielder who is now back at the club after three seasons with Catania.

Juan Roman RIQUELME
Age 33 (24.06.78)
The team's reference point and leader, on and off the pitch. Despite constant criticism from sectors of the press, he is Boca's most important player.

Diego RIVERO
Age 30 (11.08.81)
Industrious worker who offers a more defensive option than Ledesma on the right.

Juan SANCHEZ MINO
Age 22 (01.01.90)
Promising left-sided player who has been getting more game time following Nico Colazo's injury.

Leandro SOMOZA
Age 31 (26.01.81)
Experienced holding midfielder who was signed from Velez Sarsfield.

Orlando GAONA LUGO (Par)
Age 21 (25.07.90)
A forward but used as an attacking full-back by Borghi, injury has restricted his chances.

Pablo MOUCHE
Age 24 (11.10.87)
Creative influence who can operate down either flank.

Santiago SILVA (Uru)
Age 31 (09.12.80)
Burly centre-forward brought in from Fiorentina at Falcioni's insistence. Has a strong track record in Argentinian football.

LA BOMBONERA (capacity 49,000)

Officially known as the Estadio Alberto J Armando, the ground gets its name – which means "the chocolate box" – due to its shape: a "flat" stand on one side of the pitch with three steep stands round the rest of the ground. Opened in 1938.

Rio de Janeiro

Peterjon Cresswell visits the Brazilian beachside metropolis that will host the 2014 World Cup Final

Rio de Janeiro may be the setting for world football's showpiece event in 2014, at the newly refurbished Maracana stadium, but as far as domestic football goes the city has had to play second fiddle to both Sao Paulo and its neighbour Santos in recent seasons.

Only two of the last 11 national championships have ended up in Rio, with **Flamengo** and **Fluminense** claiming successive titles in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

Nevertheless, the Fla-Flu derby remains one of the fiercest in world football and dates back to 1912, when disgruntled Fluminense players left the club to form a football section at Flamengo who, like many football teams in Brazil, started out in life as a rowing club. Flamengo, who are the country's most popular club, have five national championships to their name, while Fluminense have three.

Both teams normally play their home games at the Maracana, but they have been lodging at **Botafogo**'s Engenhao home while renovation work is carried out on the famous old stadium.

Also formed as a rowing club, Botafogo contested the first-ever Rio derby, against Fluminense in 1905, and have won two national titles, the last coming in 1995.

Despite being relegated from Serie A for the first time in their history in 2008, four-times champions **Vasco da Gama** are back in the top flight and were runners-up behind Corinthians last season. **WS**

Historic...the rivalry between Fluminense (striped shirts) and Flamengo dates back 100 years

BOTAFOGO/FLAMENGO/FLUMINENSE

ESTADIO OLIMPICO JOAO HAVELANGE

Also known as the Engenhao, after the surrounding neighbourhood, the host arena for the athletics at the 2016 Olympics was opened in June 2007 and is rented by Botafogo from the city of Rio de Janeiro. With the renovation of the Maracana underway, it is also the temporary home for Flamengo and Fluminense. Named in honour of Brazil's long-serving former FIFA president, the stadium's current capacity of 47,000 will be increased to 60,000 for the Olympics. The arena is situated next to the Engenho da Dentro railway station.

DIARY DATES

The Brazilian championship kicks off on May 19, with Botafogo at home to Sao Paulo and Vasco da Gama hosting Gremio. The following weekend sees Flamengo entertain Internacional and Figueirense visit Fluminense.

Before then, however, Fluminense and Flamengo both have home games against Argentinian opposition in the Libertadores Cup group stage, playing Boca Juniors, on April 11, and Lanus, April 12, respectively.

CITY MINNOWS

As well as the "big four", this year's state championship, the Campeonato Carioca, which began in January and ends on May 12, also involves four minor teams from the city: Bangu, Bonsucesso, Madureira and Olaria.

VASCO DA GAMA

SAO JANUARIO

Once the biggest stadium in South America when it was opened in 1927, the 25,000-capacity arena is still the biggest non-municipal venue in the city. It is open on one side, and a signature chapel has stood in the gap since 1955. With a swimming pool alongside, the stadium will host the rugby sevens event at the 2016 Olympics. Situated at Rua Ricardo Machado 643, near the National Observatory in Sao Cristovao, the ground is on bus routes 209, 209A, 355, 472 and 473.

Galeao International Airport is 12 miles north of Rio.

2 MILES
2 KM

ESTADIO OLIMPICO JOAO HAVELANGE

2 mile radius

SAO JANUARIO STADIUM

MARACANA STADIUM

Santos Dumont Airport is less than a mile from downtown Rio.

Christ the Redeemer is said to be the largest Art Deco statue in the world.

SUGARLOAF MOUNTAIN

COPACABANA

IPANEMA

MARACANA

Set to become only the second stadium to stage two World Cup Finals, this iconic arena was built for the 1950 tournament and was still unfinished when a world-record 200,000 people crammed in to witness the Brazil-Uruguay Final. By the 1980s the ground was crumbling, and in 1992 a stand collapsed, killing three people and injuring 50. Currently closed for renovation, it is expected to re-open in 2013, with the capacity for the 2014 World Cup and the Olympics in 2016 set to be 77,000. Situated on Rua Professor Eurico Rabelo, the stadium has its own stop on metro line 2.

WHERE IN THE WORLD

Brazil's capital city from 1763 until 1960, Rio is home to approximately 6.3 million people, making it the 26th largest in the world.

Facetoface

CARLO ANCELOTTI

"With two or three more players we can be competitive in the Champions League"

The Italian coach of big-spending French club Paris Saint-Germain has his eye on the biggest prize of all

What was it that convinced you to take the coaching job at Paris Saint-Germain?
Why? (Laughs) Because I thought it was interesting – the project of this club, the ambition of this club. I am interested because we want to be something special here, because this club is very young. It was born in 1970 and they have won just two championships and some cups, but we want to be in the Champions League next year and to do out best in that competition.

You have been at Milan, a club with a long history who have won seven European Cups, and Chelsea, a club that have had a lot of recent success. How would you compare PSG to your two previous jobs?
This club does not have a big history like Milan, like Manchester United, like Real Madrid, like Barcelona. But the aim is to reach that kind of level. And, of course, we need to work hard, we need to take time. Presence in the Champions League next season will be good to create a new structure and a new philosophy at the club – and a new experience for a lot of the players. For that reason, there is a lot of enthusiasm around this club. The club is young, the people that are working here are young and the owner is young.

What were your first impressions of the club's owner, Nasser Al Khelaifi, when you met him?
It's very simple; his objective is very clear. He wants to build a good image of this club, to build one of the top clubs in Europe, and he wants my experience and my knowledge to help the club and the team to improve quickly. He has a fantastic passion for football. He knows everything about football.

Would it be a big failure if PSG don't win Ligue 1 this season?
No, it will not be a problem for the club. Obviously, when I joined, the club were at the top of the league so I have to try to do the best I can to keep them there until the end of the season. But the aim is to play in the Champions League, so there is not a problem if we are not able to win the league.

What would be the extent of your expectations if you are in the Champions League next season?
To be competitive in the Champions League means to move on from the group phase, so we want to be competitive next year. I think that next season, with two or three more players we can be competitive in the Champions League. This club has changed a lot so there was not a clear way to follow. It is a new club because the team was rebuilt in the summer. The club bought 12 players very quickly and the club is improving day by day. We changed something when I arrived here, we put more technology in the training ground, and day by day we want to improve. In January we bought fantastic players like Maxwell, Alex and Thiago Motta, who have a lot of experience. I think in the summer the market will be more open and we will have more possibilities.

What kind of players will you be looking for in the summer?
All positions on the pitch. We need to have a defender, a midfielder, a striker. Of course, we have a possibility to invest money, but we have to invest the right money in the right area and on the right player. We are paying attention to the salary, of course, because maybe some think they can come here and earn what they want, but that is not true.

How close did PSG come to getting David Beckham and Carlos Tevez in the winter transfer window?
The club tried to find an agreement with Beckham, but I was not here at the time and not involved in this. I think they were very close, but in the end Beckham decided to stay in Los Angeles and play for LA Galaxy. Tevez was a different matter. His first choice was Milan, but he had a problem with them. His second choice was us, but we could not reach a financial agreement with him, which is why we couldn't buy him.

What do you think of French football at the moment? How do you think Ligue 1 compares with the other top leagues in Europe?
It's different football compared to the Premier League in England; the tactical system here is more Italian. You have to play against teams that have a good defensive knowledge, so it's not easy. In England matches can finish 7–0 or 6–2. Here, like in Italy, that is impossible.

You coached Leonardo for one season at Milan and now, as PSG's director of football, he's your boss. How does that relationship work?
I have a very good relationship with Leonardo. I think part of the reason I am here is because he knows me very well and he knows what kind of job I can do. When we met for the first time, we were agreed on everything.

Interview by Pedro Pinto

On trying to sign Kaka...

"When you try to sign players like Kaka from Real Madrid it is very difficult because Madrid want to keep their most important players"

Facetoface

ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO

"The Euros will be my last great football adventure"

Now 35, Ukraine's former Milan and Chelsea striker says this summer's tournament on home soil will provide a fitting finale

How surprised are you to still be playing for Ukraine at this late stage of your career?
It is of great pride for me because playing in the national team at the highest level at my age is not easy. I am happily surprised at myself, too, because I did not think I would still be playing. I've always loved football and I'm still loving it. I owe everything to football, really. It has been my whole life and it will continue to be in the future, I hope. I'm happy and still have the enthusiasm of a kid who continues to chase his dream.

What will it mean to you to play in Euro 2012 in your home country?
It's a dream of mine and for my generation, but also a dream of a young country which is still on the road to becoming a great, modern democracy. Sport, as so often happens, comes before the politics of governments and diplomacy, and achieves things that the authorities and institutions cannot. Football is the people's passion that brings so many different people together. Ukraine has never hosted a major sporting event like the European Championship. Of course, we still have many problems, but we have been making great efforts to be prepared. I'm sure the big event will offer to Europe a great young country that wants to emerge and grow, to open itself up to other people. For me, the Euros will be my last great football adventure. It will be a fantastic feeling playing at home. I could not ask for a better way to close my career.

How much of an impact can Ukraine's fans make at this tournament?
Ukrainians have always been crazy about football, even before the end of the great Soviet era. Supporters of Ukraine, however, are different from those in western Europe because they do not participate in the game like in Italy, Spain, Greece or in other Mediterranean countries. They do not sing or clap all the time for a good tackle or a corner kick or a foul. They have a different approach to the game and to other sporting events. It does not mean that they aren't warm supporters though, and I am pretty sure they will be our 12th man on the pitch.

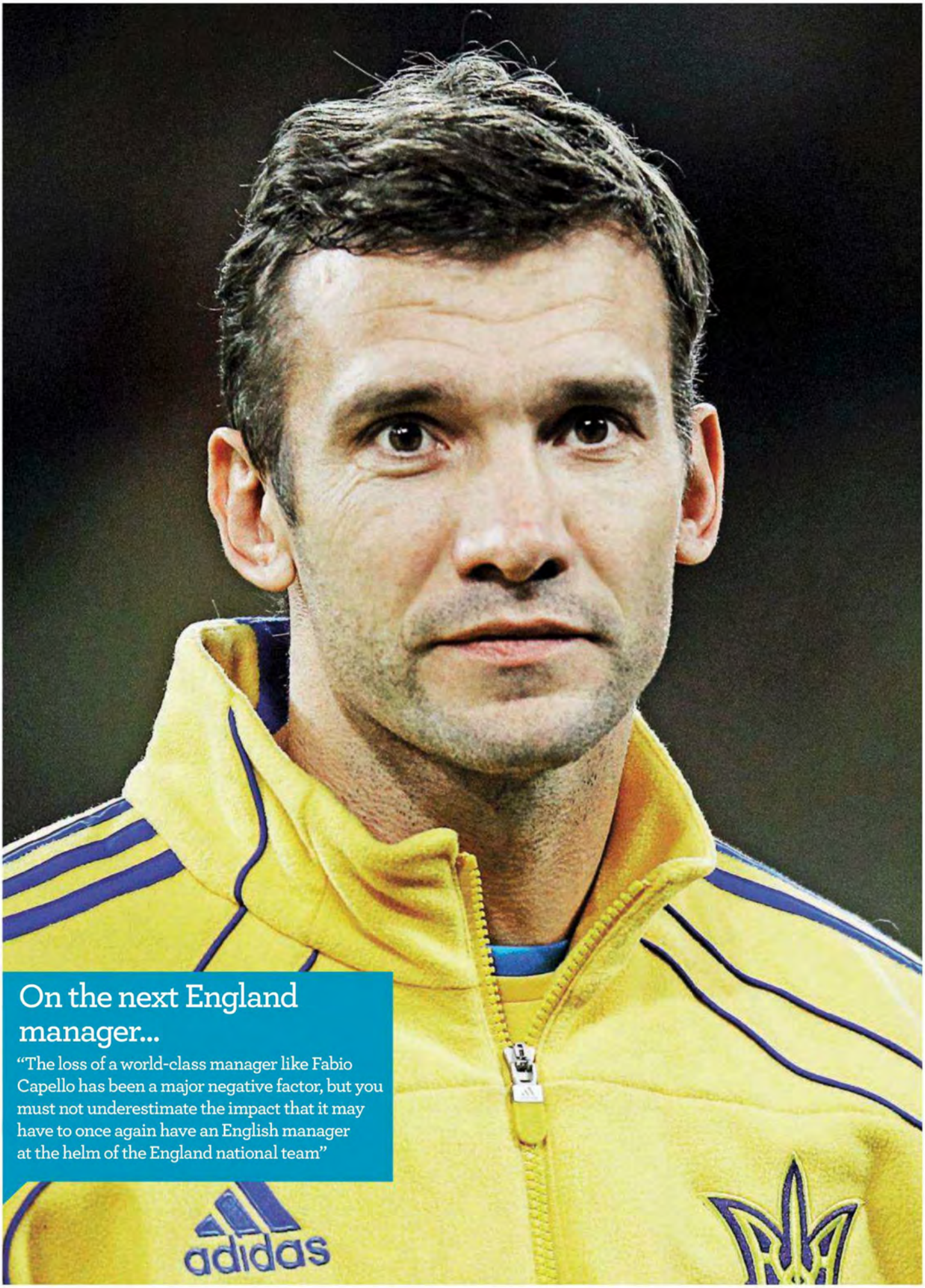
Is it fair to say you are underdogs?
Unfortunately the draw has not favoured us because France, England and Sweden are very strong teams with a great tradition in European football. But being the underdog is OK for us. It is better to travel with the lights off, especially when you're the co-host. We have a good team, a pretty deep squad, but maybe we do not have a generation of top players like we did a few years ago. That said, we have a good mix of young talent and veterans. Our coach, Oleg Blokhin, is a world-class former footballer and I'm glad he's back after four years to lead the national team because he was our greatest player, a true symbol for the country in difficult times. We trust in him and he trusts in us.

What do you make of your three group opponents?
Maybe Sweden are not so strong in defence and in midfield, but they will still be a candidate for a semi-finals berth. They also have nothing to lose. No stress, no pressure. And with Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the squad everything is possible. Laurent Blanc has done a great job in his first year at the helm of France and I think they will reap the fruits of that this summer. Maybe France are not ready yet to win, but I'm pretty sure they will be among the main contenders. The most dangerous thing about France is they have plenty of talent, especially in the front line with Karim Benzema, Samir Nasri, Franck Ribery and Jeremy Menez. As for England, they have so many top players and maybe this is the last great opportunity to win something with the golden generation of Frank Lampard, John Terry, Ashley Cole – all of them my former team-mates at Chelsea – and also Steven Gerrard.

Who is your tip to win the competition if Ukraine do not make it all the way?
Germany is my favourite right now, along with Spain and Holland. Spain are great, although they are perhaps less brilliant than they were one or two seasons ago. Germany are probably the best in the world now as they have so many talented players and a bright, young and multi-ethnic team. They can win it. Poland could be a possible surprise. They play at home too and they have many young, skilful players. If they start well, with the right enthusiasm, they could go a long way; maybe not winning the tournament, but getting to the last four. It would be a great success for them. As for us, the semi-finals would be a dream.

Which three players are most likely to be in the race to win the "Most Valuable Player" award?
Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney, for sure, if England progress and he manages to play a few more games in the latter stages. And then there is my friend and former Milan team-mate Andrea Pirlo, who at the 2006 World Cup was fantastic. He has had an extraordinary career and deserves to win another great major trophy. I hope he'll win the Ballon d'Or too.

Interview by Christian Giordano



On the next England manager...

"The loss of a world-class manager like Fabio Capello has been a major negative factor, but you must not underestimate the impact that it may have to once again have an English manager at the helm of the England national team"

The north-south divide

Jonathan Wilson explains why tactical developments in Brazil from more than 50 years ago are still having repercussions in Europe

After Brazil had won the World Cup in 1958 using a back four, the rest of the world were forced to react. Almost overnight the old-school W-M formation, which dominated tactical thinking almost everywhere else, seemed outmoded and needed revision. As a result, teams essentially took one of two routes – and the route they chose was determined almost entirely on national grounds, with that choice continuing to have an effect on the basic tactical template in those countries today.

The revolution in Brazil was actually a process of evolution, with the 2-3-5 line-up enduring even after the 1925 change in the offside law which prompted a rethink in Europe. However, when the Hungarian coach Dori Kurschner was appointed at Flamengo in 1937 things started to change.

Kurschner wanted the centre-half and two inside-forwards to play deeper, but the change in style was unpopular with many and the coach was forced out in 1938. The club turned back to Flavio Costa, the man Kurschner had replaced and who had acted as his assistant.

Although Costa had undermined his boss at every turn, mocking his new tactical outlook, he privately recognised the wisdom of the formational changes. He repackaged Kurschner's ideas as "the diagonal" by pulling one of the half-backs a little deeper and advancing one of the inside-forwards, thereby beginning the process that would eventually culminate in the creation of 4-2-4 in the early 1950s.

Swiss influence

The tactical developments in Switzerland were far quicker. Karl Rappan, who was fed up with seeing his semi-professional players at Servette overrun by fitter opponents in the 1930s, pulled back his half-backs to flank the full-backs, one of whom operated as a sweeper behind the defence – the *verrou* (bolt) – creating a 1-3-3-3 formation.

The Swiss influence over football in Italy was particularly strong at the time. Vittorio Pozzo, who coached Italy to World Cup success in 1934 and 1938, spent two years with Zurich club Grasshoppers, while Francesco Cali, who captained Italy in their first-ever international in 1910, was educated in Lausanne. Furthermore, most teams in the north of the country fielded at least one Swiss player in the years between the wars. These influences probably helped sow the seeds for the arrival of the Italian catenaccio defensive system, which took off in the 1950s.

By pulling a half-back behind the back three, Viani was one of the pioneers of the catenaccio system

Diagonal theory... Costa was a key figure in the development of the 4-2-4 formation

Giuseppe Viani, one of the pioneers of the system, claimed he had devised catenaccio while taking a dawn walk by the docks at Salerno in 1947 and saw a fishing boat using a reserve net to sweep up any fish the main net had missed.

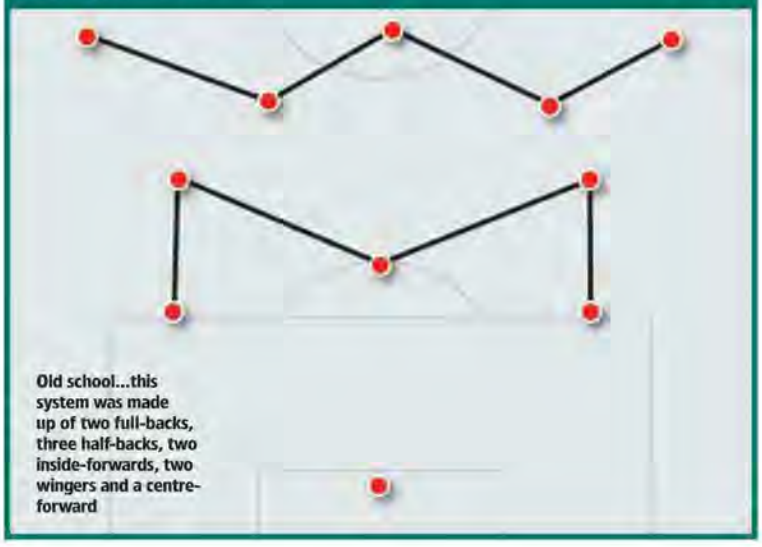
By pulling a half-back behind the back three, Viani began the process that would lead to Milan and Internazionale becoming major forces in European club football in the 1960s. By then the system had evolved to feature a sweeper, a marking centre-back, a right-back who would tuck in and mark, an attacking left-back and a right-winger – the *tornante* (returner) – who would shuttle back to fill the space left by the narrow right-back.

Elsewhere in Europe, subtle and not so subtle variations began to appear, often quite independently of each other.

In the Soviet Union, Boris Arkadiev had been dabbling with a back four from the mid-1940s as he sought a platform for the "organised disorder" of his highly mobile midfield and forward lines at Dynamo Moscow. The famous Hungary side of the early 1950s used their left-half, Jozsef Zakarias, so deep that he almost functioned as a fourth defender, while in England the process was much blunter, with a half-back dragged back to make the back three into a back four.

By the mid-1960s, another Soviet coach, Viktor Maslov, had developed a "pressing" game, in which his players hounded the ball in packs, confident that his zonal marking system was sophisticated enough not to leave opponents free in dangerous areas. And in Holland it became apparent that pressing was even more effective when

THE W-M FORMATION



Old school...this system was made up of two full-backs, three half-backs, two inside-forwards, two wingers and a centre-forward

combined with a high offside line.

During the 1960s, Europe effectively split into two camps: one half preferring a libero, and the other half favouring a back four and a pressing game. In general terms, the north – Britain, Holland and, eventually, Scandinavia - went with pressing, while the south – Italy, Yugoslavia and Spain – adopted the libero. Two key exceptions were Germany, who only really ditched the libero in favour of pressing in the mid-1990s, and the Soviet Union who combined pressing with a libero.

It's tempting to speculate why this should be, particularly as, in western Europe, the split mirrors the Protestant-Catholic divide – even down to the odd hybrid position of Germany. Could it be that those brought up with a Protestant work ethic feel the need to always be doing something, hence the constant movement of pressing? It could equally be the case that in the warmer climate of southern Europe a more reactive style of football was preferable. Whatever the reasons, few countries seem to have diverted from the stylistic path that they adopted following the demise of W-M.

There are, of course, revolutionaries, the likes of Arrigo Sacchi who brought a pressing 4-4-2 to Milan or Jim Smith who used a 3-5-2 at QPR, but they self-consciously went against the grain.

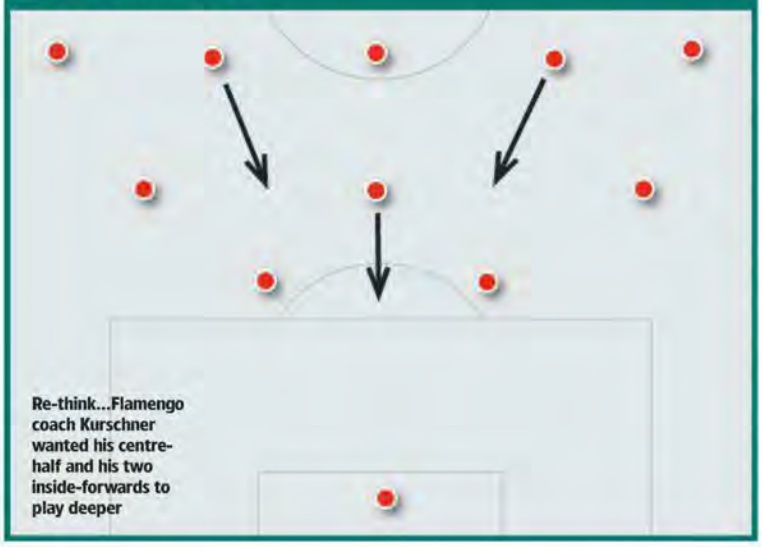
The back three

Italian football under catenaccio got used to having three de facto centre-backs with one wide player who covered the length of each flank, so it makes sense that it is there that the revival of the back three has been at its strongest. Italian football likes the comfort of a packed centre, but found last season that its preferred 4-3-1-2 was too narrow.

Udinese and Napoli showed that by pulling a midfielder back and advancing the full-backs they could have width higher up the pitch. In fact, so widespread has the shift to 3-4-3 been in Italian football that, on one weekend in January earlier this year, 13 of the 20 sides playing in Serie A deployed that formation at some stage. But then they were preconditioned to do so.

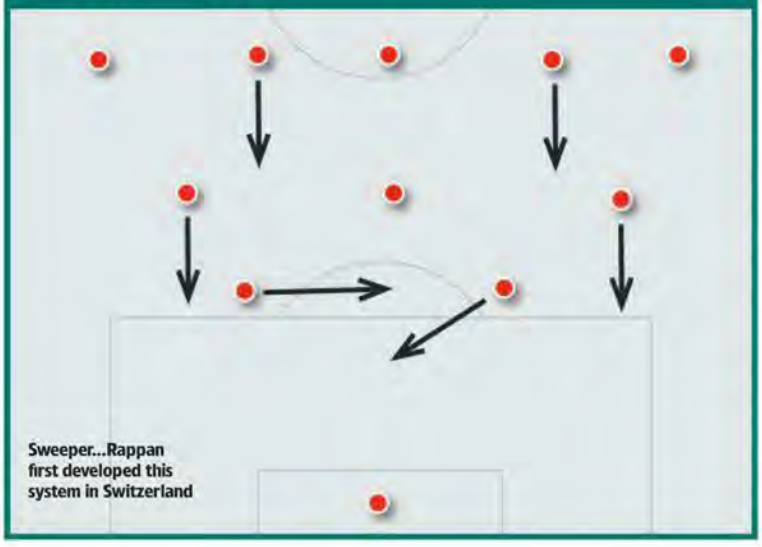
The great split of the 1960s – the divide between pressing and playing with a libero – continues to shape football today. WS

HOW 2-3-5 BECAME 3-4-3



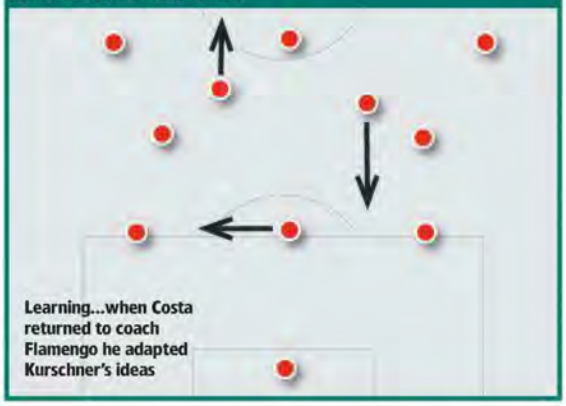
Re-think...Flamengo coach Kurschner wanted his centre-half and his two inside-forwards to play deeper

HOW 2-3-5 BECAME 1-3-3-3



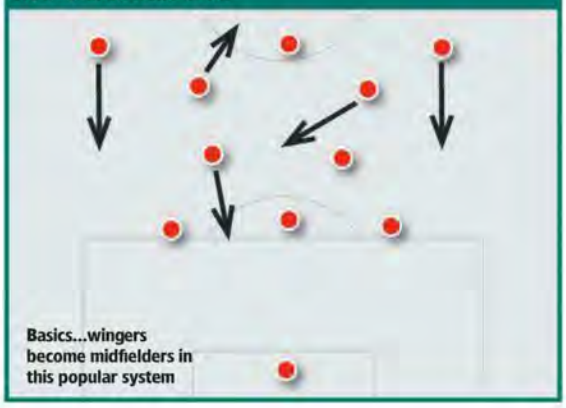
Sweeper...Rappan first developed this system in Switzerland

HOW 3-4-3 BECAME 4-2-4



Learning...when Costa returned to coach Flamengo he adapted Kurschner's ideas

HOW W-M BECAME 4-4-2



Basics...wingers become midfielders in this popular system

> Germany only really ditched the libero in favour of the pressing game during the mid-1990s

Sweeper man...Rappan (back row, fourth right)

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Keir Radnedge

THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Clubs clean up

Rummenigge and co get more than they bargained for from UEFA's Istanbul congress

Happy...Rummenigge (left, with Bayern president Uli Hoeness) has won significant concessions from UEFA

Back in August, Michel Platini sat in the shade of a hotel gazebo in Monte Carlo and talked through the various issues, great and small, of world and European football, from Financial Fairplay to the magic of Lionel Messi.

He was comparatively dismissive of sabre-rattling by Europe's clubs, as represented by the European Club Association. "UEFA is just one federation out of six in FIFA," he said. "And the clubs are not as important as maybe they think they are in terms of all the world of football."

Either Platini underestimated the clubs and their leader, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, or he was teasing them. Either way, if UEFA Congress in Istanbul had been a card school the clubs would have come away celebrating after winning nearly every trick.

They have forced a trimming of the 2014-18 international calendar, which includes a scrapping of the hated August friendly, and they cleverly played off UEFA and FIFA to gain a significant increase in insurance cover for players on national team duty and in "player hire fees" at the World Cup and European Championship finals.

While Platini and co were focused on the introduction of Financial Fairplay, the fight against match fixing, and bringing European Union politicians and legislators into the process, the clubs ran off with a large chunk of the family silver. They will receive an increased share of £100million from Euro 2012, which is almost twice the original sum proffered by UEFA. The clubs will then share £150m from Euro 2016 in France, when the tournament expands from 16 to 24 teams.

FIFA may also increase the promised £70m for clubs who send players to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. The world federation is also initiating an insurance policy for all players called up on all national team duty, anywhere. All it needs is approval by FIFA Congress in May and then it will swallow up a European policy already put in place by an impatient UEFA.

No wonder Rummenigge, who is also chairman of Bayern Munich, was a happy man. He said: "This proves there is harmony, loyalty and fairness in European football. We are not after a revolution. We just want to play a fair part in decisions."

It seems that both he and Platini, in very different ways, got more than they bargained for.

● Turkey, having lost out to France by one vote for Euro 2016, wants to host the 2020 finals. Trouble is, Istanbul is bidding to host the Olympic Games that summer as well. The danger is that the Turks will miss out on both.

Time for British to let go

Late in the day, the Football Association has seen the light: the British vice-presidency of FIFA is not merely an anachronism but a privileged provocation to the rest of the world.

It is also the means by which Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales keep their own joint seat at the FIFA ExCo table while shutting out the English.

Time to let it go. But as for the four British places on the International Board...that's another matter entirely.

Solutions...with technology the goal by Clint Hill (above) for QPR against Bolton Wanderers would not have been ruled out

Pieth in our time

Mark Pieth, the Basle professor who has been heading up the FIFA reform project, came close to "doing a Valcke" as he considered the vexed issue of the ISL file.

FIFA secretary-general Jerome Valcke let his irritation and impatience with filibustering Brazilian politicians boil over when he exclaimed that they needed "a kick up the backside" to approve and enact the World Cup Law underpinning the hosting of the finals.

Pieth, without being quite as graphic at this stage, suggested that the Swiss Supreme Court needed to display some positive intent over the contentious ISL file whose publication is blocked by two anonymous parties (widely reported to be ex-FIFA president Joao Havelange and his former son-in-law Ricardo Teixeira).

Five media organisations are now joined in an action to have the original veil of secrecy lifted from around the file, with its list of millions of dollars in illicit payments – "none of it involving Swiss nationals," says Sepp Blatter. But the court appears bent on sitting on the action until mid-summer.

Pieth, who originally insisted he wanted to look to the future rather than the past, has come to understand over the past six months the importance of learning the lessons of history. I understand he would like to see FIFA's commercial activities removed from the ambit of the executive committee altogether which, given the financial trough-slurping of some members, is understandable.

To be fair, it also sounds impractical. A governing body has to govern all aspects of an organisation and, when World Cup revenue is all that FIFA has, it's impossible to see how the ExCo could ever distance itself from control and command.

As for the ISL file, however, that is now an issue for the court and – as FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport have both demonstrated in recent times – speed is not a priority in the Swiss system.

> When World Cup revenue is all that FIFA has, it's impossible to see how the ExCo could ever distance itself from control

Pieth has even floated the idea that FIFA might consider publishing the document without the court's permission, but realises that such a gesture is legally impractical.

However he does say: "Nobody has really seen the document because it would be a contempt of court issue if they gave it to us. Blatter has not given it to anybody because he is not allowed to. That's the point. But the opportunity to examine it is crucial to our understanding of where FIFA stands.

"This would be another element for us to say: 'Look, we are not satisfied with how these things have been dealt with.' But we want to see it officially and we want to see it published. I think the federal court should speed up a bit. In politically sensitive issues they could work a bit faster."

He sounds like Valcke on Brazil a year ago, being impatiently polite and diplomatic. Will we find Pieth suggesting, in 12 months' time, that both FIFA and the Swiss Supreme Court need a "kick up the backside"?

Making his point... Pieth is frustrated at the slowness of Swiss Supreme Court action over the ISL issue

Goal-line technology gets green light from IFAB

Goal-line technology (GLT) is on the way, at last, it seems. The lawmakers of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) will approve it for use at a special meeting in Kiev on July 2 - assuming the two shortlisted Hawk-Eye and/or GoalRef systems withstand final testing.

Hawk-Eye depends on cameras while GoalRef – a Danish-German operation – is all about a chip in the ball and a "sensor pad" beneath the area of the goal.

Media excitement over that decision, taken by the IFAB annual meeting in Bagshot, south-west of London, was focused on whether GLT could be rushed forward for the Premier League next season. FA general secretary Alex Horne explained that the sheer practicalities rendered this virtually impossible.

So the Club World Cup in Japan this December will probably be its first outing.

Debate over the IFAB decision demonstrated, however, that the majority of players, officials, media and fans probably do not understand what is being discussed. This is not video technology, and there is no appeals system or a big-screen display for the crowd.

The other essential stipulation – apart from accuracy, of course – is that a confirmatory signal should be relayed to the referee within one second of the ball crossing the line.

A more likely scenario is that GLT will also be in operation at the Confederations Cup next year and then in some European leagues – England, probably Italy, possibly Germany, France and Spain – for the start of the 2013-14 season.

That will not be the end of the matter, of course. Once GLT is in place it will need only the first refereeing misjudgment of a penalty or an offside and the demand for full, all-pitch video assistance will come chorusing down.

Which is why Blatter, for one, was always originally opposed by goal-line technology.

The other IFAB decisions were:

- The British four were cleared to undertake a two-year experiment with rolling substitutes in junior football.
- Confirmed that a goal cannot be scored directly from an "uncontested" dropped ball.
- Approved the optional use in leagues by referees of a "vanishing spray" to delineate the 9m-mark at free-kicks.
- Approved the wearing of a specifically designed headscarf by Muslim women players.
- Noted the withdrawal of a proposal to permit use of a fourth substitute during extra-time.
- Referred, unresolved, the issue of the "triple punishment" (on penalties) back to the assortment of working groups, task forces and committees.

IFAB reversed a ban at international level on the headscarf after what was praised as a "fantastic" presentation by Prince Ali of Jordan, a FIFA vice-president for less than a year.

6 of the best

Stars of the Chinese league

Nick Bidwell profiles some of the best players in the Chinese Super League

1 Dario CONCA

Guangzhou Evergrande

More or less every South American professional with a modicum of ability heads straight for the European fields of dreams. So just what prompted this gifted Argentinian attacking midfielder to take the most unusual step last year of swopping Brazilian outfit Fluminense for Guangzhou in the Chinese top flight?

The answer, of course, is money – and lots of it. The £6.3million Guangzhou offered for a player who has yet to represent his country at senior level was simply too good for Flu to turn down. And while Conca admitted to thinking long and hard about the switch, the proposed annual salary of £8.64m was ultimately irresistible. Thanks to the largesse of Guangzhou, who are owned by the Evergrande real estate group of super-rich businessman Xu Jiayin, the 28-year-old now sits proudly among world football's leading earners.

Having spent time with Argentinian clubs Tigre, Rosario Central and River Plate, Chilean side Universidad Catolica and Vasco da Gama in Brazil, Conca joined Fluminense in 2008. While there he won a Brazilian title and was twice voted the league's player of the year. Guangzhou's massive investment in the left-footer is already paying off, with his goals and creativity inspiring the club to a first-ever league title last year.

2 Roda ANTAR

Shandong Luneng

It makes perfect sense for the Lebanon international playmaker to currently be headlining in the increasingly high-profile Chinese Super League. Top of the bill in Asia for the best part of a dozen years and runner-up in the 2004 AFC player of the year poll - behind Iran's Ali Karimi - the 31-year-old is one of the continent's big hitters.

First given his chance in Lebanon's national side by German coach Theo Bucker, he went on to spend eight years in the Bundesliga with Hamburg, Freiburg – where he was a huge fan favourite – and Cologne, the club where it all began to go wrong for him during the 2008-09 season. Bust-ups with coach Christoph Daum and general manager Michael Meier, missed training sessions, suspension from the first-team squad and a war of words in the media meant he had no option other than to leave. So when Shandong came in for him in the spring of 2009 he jumped at the chance of a clean break in eastern China.

A proven goalscorer during his three years in the CSL, he helped Shandong claim the title in 2010 with his cultured and imaginative play.

3 Joel GRIFFITHS

Shanghai Shenhua

High-profile France striker Nicolas Anelka was not the only foreign front runner to say yes to a nice fat pay packet in Shanghai during the pre-season. The feisty Aussie, who is as much of a threat on the right wing as he is through the middle, also joined Shenhua in January – and he is likely to need far less time to adapt than his illustrious team-mate.

A regular goalscorer over the past three seasons with Beijing Guoan - notably helping them to win the league in 2009 - the 32-year-old already knows the lay of the Super League land and, after stints in England and Japan, he has clearly found a home from home in China. However, his latest move may not be an easy one as Beijing and Shanghai are arch-rivals and view one another with deep mistrust.

The leading marksman in the Australian top-flight in 2007-08 with 12 goals for Newcastle Jets, his one major regret is his lack of international recognition. Since making his debut for Australia back in 2005, he has made only two further appearances and could not contain his anger when national coach Pim Verbeek left him out of his 2010 World Cup squad.

"Verbeek said he had better strikers than me," recalls Griffiths. "How would he know? He's never come to see me play in two years."

4 Leandro NETTO

Henan Construction

Henan owe a huge debt to their Brazilian striker Netto. Responsible for 14 of the club's 29 goals in last year's Super League, the 32-year-old single-handedly kept the club out of the relegation zone – so it's no wonder that fans regularly chant his name and hang portraits of him all over their home ground.

In his fourth year with Henan - he joined them in 2009 from minor Rio de Janeiro side Mesquita - Netto's massive box-office appeal in China contrasts markedly with the relative anonymity of an earlier career which took in both the Brazilian mainstream (Corinthians and Atletico Paranaense) and backwaters, plus all manner of postings in Europe (Portugal, Spain and Serbia) and a stint in Syria with Al Karamah.

A real threat in the air, he is mobile and also takes a mean free-kick. While he admits he still has problems with the Chinese language, as long as the goals keep coming no one at Henan could care less.

5 LI Weifeng

Tianjin Teda

Despite more than 100 caps for China, captaincy of the national team at the 2002 World Cup, a domestic league title with Shenzhen Jianlibao and two Korean Cups at Suwon Bluewings, the 33-year-old central defender has struggled to command the respect that his record seemingly demands.

However, Li's combative style and aerial strength have often been overshadowed by numerous red cards and contempt for authority. In 2008 he was continually making the headlines - for all the wrong reasons. As well as attempting to choke a Japanese opponent during an East Asian Championship tie, he received an eight-match ban for violent conduct when playing for Wuhan Guanggu against Beijing and was axed from the national team for his aggressive nature.

His 2009 move to Suwon signalled a marked change in attitude, and on returning to China early last year to play for Tianjin Teda he was not only recalled to the national side after a 33-month exile but also handed the skipper's armband.

6 YU Hanchao

Liaoning Whowin

The left-winger was by common consent the best home-grown player in the Chinese Super League last season, scoring 12 goals, making many others and forever causing panic in opposing defences with his high energy levels, cheeky skills and bristling determination. Along with attacking-third co-stars Yang Xu and Zhao Junzhe, he provided much of the impetus for his club's surprising third-place finish.

Also able to perform on the right-flank or in central midfield, Yu is reported to be a transfer target for current champions Guangzhou Evergrande and the chances of him moving there increased considerably when Liaoning withdrew in a fit of pique from the Asian Champions League – angered by the decision of the organisers to remove their right to automatic qualification, and instead making them go through the play-offs.

Despite their reputation as a club where players stay loyal through thick and thin, Liaoning may soon have to face up to the fact that the 25-year-old is not tied to them. A product of the club's youth team, Yu unusually made his full debut for China – as a substitute in a friendly with Germany in May 2009 – while playing his club football in the second division.

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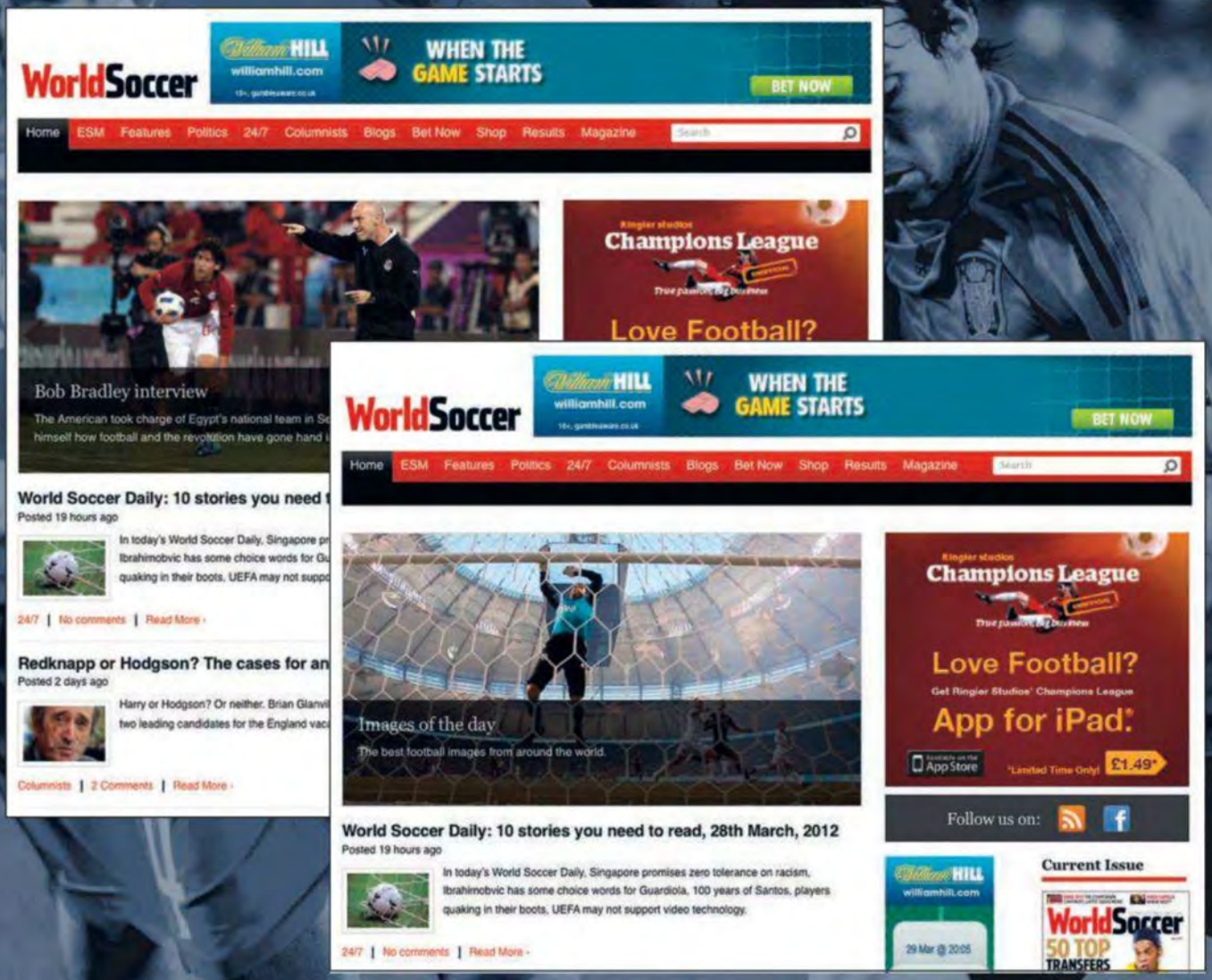

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Uplifting...Paulo Henrique Ganso (no10) celebrates his goal for Santos against Juan Aurich in the Libertadores Cup with team-mate Neymar

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Drama...goalkeeper Joe Hart (left) sees his header go wide in the last minutes of Manchester City's Europa League game against Sporting Lisbon

BRAZIL

Copa set to move

The 2015 Copa America is set to be moved to Chile as Brazil now wants to host the 2019 tournament instead.

New Brazilian federation president Jose Maria Marin has announced that the decision had been taken to prevent any further changes to the country's domestic calendar, which has already been altered for the next four years as a result of Brazil staging the Confederations Cup, the World Cup and the Olympic Games. CONMEBOL, the governing body for South America, has yet to approve the change.

Meanwhile, the five-times world champions will play Japan in a friendly in Wroclaw, Poland, on October 16.

Decision...Marin says Brazil no longer wants the 2015 Copa America

ITALY

Euro warm-ups

Cesare Prandelli's side will warm up for the European Championship with games at home to Luxembourg, on May 29, and v Russia in Switzerland three days later.

JAPAN

Rematch in August

Japan will host Venezuela in

Internationals

AFC CHALLENGE CUP FINALS

In Kathmandu, Nepal

Group A

Mar 8
Turkmenistan 3 (Mingazov 33, Chonkayev 78, Amanov 85)
Maldives 1 (Adhuham 20)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Al Marzouq (Kuw)
Turkmenistan: Alyhanov - Annaorazov, Soyunov, Atayev, Sarkisov, Baltayev, Mingazov, Choliyev (Abylov 46), Astanov, Shamuradov (Chonkayev 59), Amanov (Durdiyev 88).
Maldives: Imran - Shifan, Ghani, Shafiu, Umair, Arif, Waheed (Thasneem 82), Adhuham (Rasheed 59), Naseer (Niyaz 66), Fazeel, Thariq.
Sent off: Thariq 81min.

Mar 8
Nepal 0
Palestine 2 (Attieh 4, Attai 64)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 12,300. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)
Nepal: Chemzong - R Shrestha, Maharjan (Karki 76), Chand, S Rai, S Thapa, Khadka (Silwal 46), Tamang, Gurung, J Rai, Khawas (Sahukhala 46).
Palestine: Saleh - Abu Saleh, Mahdi, Abujazr, Nu'man (Salem 90), Wadi, Samara, Khader Yousef, Ismail, Attal (Salameh 85), Attieh (Abuhabib 72).

Mar 10
Palestine 0
Turkmenistan 0
Att: 1,000. **Ref:** Ko (SKo)
Palestine: Ali - Abu Saleh, Harbi, Mahdi, Abujazr, Nu'man, Samara (Mohammed Jamal 83), Khader Yousef, Ismail (Wadi 79), Attal, Attieh (Abuhabib 61).
Turkmenistan: Alyhanov - Annaorazov, Soyunov, Atayev, Sarkisov, Mingazov, Hojaahmedov, Tagayev (Abylov 57), Astanov, Shamuradov (Chonkayev 46), Amanov.

Mar 10
Maldives 1 (Rasheed 51)
Nepal 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Mashentsev (Kyr)
Maldives: Imran - Shifan, Ghani, Shafiu, Rasheed (Faruhad 64), Umair, Arif, Waheed, Adhuham (Ahmed 60; Naseer 90+1), Ashfaq, Ashadh.
Nepal: R Thapa - R Shrestha (Karki 40; Basnet 58), Maharjan, Chand, S Rai, S Thapa, Tamang (Sahukhala 58), Silwal, Gurung, J Rai, Khawas.

Mar 12
Nepal 0
Turkmenistan 3 (Tagayev 7, Maharjan og 79, Hangeldiyev 89)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,400. **Ref:** Sabbagh (Leb)
Nepal: Chemzong - Maharjan, Bhushal, Chand (Karki 82), S Rai, S Thapa, Khadka (S Shrestha 89), Sahukhala, Gurung, J Rai (Lawati 84), Khawas.
Turkmenistan: Alyhanov - Annaorazov, Rejepov, Soyunov, Jumanazarov, Hojaahmedov, Choliyev (Astanov 46), Chonkayev, Tagayev, Amanov (Hangeldiyev 60), Abylov (Mingazov 67).

Mar 12
Maldives 0
Palestine 2 (Wadi 59, Nu'man 90+4)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 300. **Ref:** Mashentsev (Kyr)
Maldives: Imran - Shifan, Ghani, Shafiu (Niyaz 86), Rasheed (Naseer 63), Umair, Arif, Waheed (Ahmed 86), Adhuham, Ashfaq, Ashadh.
Palestine: Saleh - Abu Saleh, Harbi, Mahdi, Abujazr, Nu'man, Wadi (Abuhabib 85), Samara (Mohammed Jamal 89), Ismail, Attal, Attieh (Khader Yousef 77).

AFC CHALLENGE CUP FINALS - GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkm'stan (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Palestine (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	0	7
Maldives	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Nepal	3	0	0	3	0	6	0

Group B

Mar 9
North Korea 2 (Pak Nam-chol (MF) 58, Jang Kuk-chol 69)
Philippines 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Singh (Ind)
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Ri Kwang-chon, Jon Kwang-ik, Pak Nam-chol (DF), Ri Kwang-hyok (Jang Song-hyok 87), Pak Nam-chol (MF), Ri Chol-myong, Pak Song-chol (MF), Pak Song-chol (FW), Jong Il-gwan, Jang Myong-il (Jang Kuk-chol 66).
Philippines: Etheridge - J Guirado (Gier 76), Mulders (Caligdong 71), Sabio, J Younghusband, Bahadoran, P Younghusband, A Guirado, Angeles (Moy 59), Jonsson, De Murga.

Mar 9
India 0
Tajikistan 2 (Khamrokulov 61, Davronov 66)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 700. **Ref:** Sabbagh (Leb)
India: K Singh - Gaikwad, Naik, Khan, Gourmangi Singh, Nabi, Pereira (Raja 69), Lamare, Fernandes, S Chhetri, S Singh (Abranches 81).
Tajikistan: Tuychiev - Suvonkulov, Razhabov, Ergashev, Negmatov, Sodykov, Davronov, Dzhalilov, Fatkhuloev (Vasiev 86), Tokhirov (Ortikov 78), Khamrokulov (Rabiev 71).

Mar 11
Tajikistan 0
North Korea 2 (Pak Nam-chol (MF) 4, Jang Kuk-chol 86)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Al Marzouq (Kuw)
Tajikistan: Tuychiev - Suvonkulov, Razhabov, Ergashev, Negmatov, Sodykov, Davronov (Vasiev 46), Dzhalilov, Fatkhuloev, Tokhirov (Rabiev 60), Khamrokulov (Rabimov 67).
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Ri Kwang-chon, Jon Kwang-ik, Pak Nam-chol (DF), Ri Kwang-hyok, Pak Nam-chol (MF), Ri Chol-myong, Pak Song-chol (MF) (Jang Song-hyok 87), Pak Song-chol (FW) (Kim Ju-song 70), Jong Il-gwan, Jang Myong-il (Jang Kuk-chol 35).

Mar 11
Philippines 2 (P Younghusband 11, 74)
India 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 300. **Ref:** Mahapab (Tha)
Philippines: Etheridge - Gier, J Guirado, Mulders, Sabio, J Younghusband, P Younghusband, A Guirado (Angeles 81), Jonsson, Caligdong (Bahadoran 55), De Murga.
India: K Singh - Gaikwad, Naik, Khan (Raja 33), Gourmangi Singh, Nabi, Lamare, Fernandes, Vashum (S Singh 70), S Chhetri, Abranches.

Mar 13
North Korea 4 (Jon Kwang-ik 3, Ri Kwang-hyok 35, Pak Nam-chol (MF) 59, Ri Chol-myong 69)
India 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 200. **Ref:** Mahapab (Tha)
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk (Kim Myong-gil 62) - Ri Kwang-chon, Jon Kwang-ik, Pak Nam-chol (DF), Jang Kuk-chol, Ri Kwang-hyok, Jang Song-hyok, Pak Nam-chol (MF) (Ri Hyon-song 61), Ri Chol-myong, Jong Il-gwan, Jang Myong-il (Kim Ju-song 53).
India: Chowdhury - Gaikwad, N Chhetri, Gourmangi Singh, Nabi, Pereira, Lamare, Raja (Rodrigues 60), Vashum (Fernandes 24), S Chhetri (Sabeeth 66), S Singh.

Mar 13
Tajikistan 1 (Negmatov 45+1)
Philippines 2 (P Younghusband 54, A Guirado 80)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 800. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)
Tajikistan: Tuychiev - Suvonkulov, Ergashev, Nazarov (Saidov 88), Negmatov, Sodykov, Davronov (Rabiev 83), Dzhalilov, Fatkhuloev, Tokhirov (Ortikov 69), Khamrokulov.
Philippines: Etheridge - Gier, J Guirado, Mulders, Sabio, J Younghusband, P Younghusband, A Guirado (Bahadoran 90), Jonsson, Caligdong (Angeles 66), De Murga.

AFC CHALLENGE CUP FINALS - GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nth Korea (Q)	3	3	0	0	8	0	9
Philippines (Q)	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Tajikistan	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
India	3	0	0	3	0	8	0

Top 2 in both groups qualified for semi-finals

Semi-finals

Mar 16
Turkmenistan 2 (Amanov 79, Chonkayev 86)
Philippines 1 (P Younghusband 25)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 500. **Ref:** Ko (SKo)
Turkmenistan: Alyhanov - Annaorazov, Rejepov, Atayev (Soyunov 37), Jumanazarov, Mingazov, Hojaahmedov (Shamuradov 60), Chonkayev, Tagayev (Abylov 68), Astanov, Amanov.
Philippines: Etheridge - Gier, J Guirado, Mulders, Bahadoran (Moy 68), P Younghusband, De Jong, Angeles, Jonsson, Caligdong (Gener 70; Araneta 89), De Murga. *Sent off: Etheridge 90+2min.*

Mar 16
North Korea 2 (Pak Kwang-ryong 42, 69)
Palestine 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Al Marzouq (Kuw)
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Ri Kwang-chon, Jon Kwang-ik, Pak Nam-chol (DF), Ri Kwang-hyok, Pak Nam-chol (MF), Ri Chol-myong, An Yong-hak, Pak Kwang-ryong, Jong Il-gwan (Jang Song-hyok 80), Jang Myong-il (Jang Kuk-chol 16; Kim Ju-song 45+2).
Palestine: Saleh - Abu Saleh, Harbi, Mahdi, Abujazr, Nu'man (Mohammed Jamal 84), Samara (Salem 69), Khader Yousef, Ismail, Attal, Attieh (Kawre 47).

3rd-place play-off

Mar 19
Philippines 4 (P Younghusband 4, pen 24, A Guirado 41, J Guirado 69)
Palestine 3 (Abuhabib 20, 67, Attai 78)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Sabbagh (Leb)
Philippines: Sacapano - Gier (De Jong 75), J Guirado, Mulders (Bahadoran 90+3), Sabio, J Younghusband, P Younghusband, A Guirado, Jonsson, Caligdong (Angeles 46), De Murga.
Palestine: Saleh - Abu Saleh, Harbi, Mahdi, Abujazr, Wadi (Mohammed Jamal 35), Samara (Nu'man 51), Abuhabib, Khader Yousef, Kawre (Barghouthi 74), Attal.

Final

Mar 19
Turkmenistan 1 (Shamuradov 2)
North Korea 2 (Jong Il-gwan 35, Jang Song-hyok pen 85)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)
Turkmenistan: Alyhanov - Annaorazov (Rejepov 64), Soyunov, Atayev, Sarkisov, Jumanazarov, Hojaahmedov, Tagayev (Mingazov 42), Astanov, Shamuradov, Abylov (Amanov 54).
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Ri Kwang-chon, Jon Kwang-ik, Pak Nam-chol (DF), Jang Kuk-chol (Kim Ju-song 53), Ri Kwang-hyok, Pak Nam-chol (MF), Ri Chol-myong, An Yong-hak (Jang Song-hyok 73), Pak Kwang-ryong (Pak Song-chol (MF) 90+2), Jong Il-gwan.

North Korea qualify for the 2015 Asian Cup finals

Previous winners

2006	Tajikistan
2008	India
2010	North Korea

FRIENDLIES

Friday, March 2

Mar 2 - Doha, Qatar
Egypt 0
DR Congo 0
Egypt: El Hadary (El Shennawi) - El Muhammady (Ali), Said, Dewidar, El Halawani, El Taqui (Abdel Zaher), El Nenni, Khairi, Salah (Eid), Ashour (Temsah), Mekki (Raouf).
DR Congo: Kidiaba - Mpeko, Kasusula, Kimwaki, Bokese (Mampuya), Kazadi, Mabidi (Emomo), Angani, Kaluyituka (Botayi), Kanda, Nseka (Basilua).

Saturday, March 3

Mar 3 - Le Lamentin
Martinique 1 (Parsemain 59)
Guadeloupe 2 (Zenon 12, Beral 75)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Martheli (Mar)
Martinique: Massee - Zaire (Ephestion 78), Cretinoir, Herelle (Dondon 90), Bannais, Abaul (Polomat 63), Nedra (Vitulin 72), Lepel, Tresfield, Angely (Gros-Desormeaux 71), Parsemain.
Guadeloupe: Otrante - Babel, Lambourde, Serman, Valmy (Sennoaj 71), Davidas (Hannany 46), Severin (Fautrai 61), Beral, Bacoul (Gomez 90), Lafortune (Gotin 64), Zenon (Amelaise 84).

Mar 3 - Basseterre
St Kitts & Nevis 1 (Tiran Hanley 25)
Antigua & Barbuda 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Willett (A&B)
St Kitts & Nevis: Archibald - K Mitchum, Leader, A Lewis (Wigley 81), Tiran Hanley, K Lewis, O Mitchum, Harris, Lake, Tishan Hanley (Warde 74), Blanchette (O'Loughlin 90).

a friendly on August 15 before their World Cup qualifiers in September. The two sides last met in February 2010, drawing 0-0 in Oita.

NORTH KOREA

Challenge Cup champs

North Korea retained their AFC Challenge Cup title in Nepal and booked their place in the 16-team 2015 Asian Cup, alongside the hosts Australia, reigning champions Japan, and South Korea.

North Korea came from behind in the Final of the eight-team tournament to beat Turkmenistan 2-1. Jang Song-hyok scored a late winner from the penalty spot – two minutes after he had given away a penalty at the other end, which Berdy Shamuradov missed.

Successful defence...North Korea retained the AFC Challenge Cup

SCOTLAND

Friendlies announced

Scotland will play at home to Australia, on August 15, and away to Luxembourg, on November 14.

SPAIN

Puerto Rican date

The world and European champions will play Puerto Rico away on August 15.

Antigua & Barbuda: James - Dublin, Mack (J Thomas 77), A Thomas, Blakely (Jeremy 89), Griffith, Robinson, Burton (Alexander 75), R Christian (Skepple 87), Smith (Kirwan 87), Byers.

Wednesday, March 21

*Mar 21 - Arica**

Chile 3 (Paredes 5, Andia 43, Mena 86)
Peru 1 (Galliquio 21)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** Quintana (Par)
Chile: Toselli - Andia (Toro 62), Casanova, Dominguez (Biskupovic 88), Diaz, Leal, Aranguiz (Carrasco 82), Millar (F Gutierrez 64), Mena, Fernandes (Puch 56), Paredes (Flores 59).
Peru: Libman - Vilchez, Galliquio, Ramos (Duarte 82), Corzo (Advincula 46), Yotun, Gonzales, Guevara (Quinteros 62), Ampuero (C Fernandez 62), Avila (J C Fernandez 46), Rengifo (Hurtado 76).
**1st leg of 2-leg Copa del Pacifico; 2nd leg on Apr 11 in Tacna, Peru*

Mar 21 - Kingston

Jamaica 0
Costa Rica 0
Ref: Gantar (Can)
Jamaica: Barrett - Virgo, R Reid, A Reid, J Taylor, Smith, Senior (Waul 78), Damion Williams (Edwards 90), Watson (Lloyd 67), Dino Williams (Adlam 63), Boyd (Phinn 46). *Sent off: J Taylor 37min.*
Costa Rica: Pemberton - Salvatierra, Acosta, Gonzalez, Lopez, J D Monge (Cordero 54), Cubero, Tejeda (Valverde 88), Gabas (Myrie 81), Arrieta (N Monge 64), Rojas.

2014 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA SECTION

● 5 finals places available

2nd round draw

Group A
Botswana
Central African Republic
Ethiopia
South Africa

Group B
Cape Verde Islands
Equatorial Guinea
Sierra Leone
Tunisia

Group C
Gambia
Ivory Coast
Morocco
Tanzania

Group D
Ghana
Lesotho
Sudan
Zambia

Group E
Burkina Faso
Congo
Gabon
Niger

Group F
Kenya
Malawi
Namibia
Nigeria

Group G
Egypt
Guinea
Mozambique
Zimbabwe

Group H
Algeria
Benin
Mali
Rwanda

Group I
Cameroon
DR Congo
Libya
Togo

Group J
Angola
Liberia
Senegal
Uganda

Games to be played June 1, 2012-Sep 6, 2013

● Group winners will qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round

● The 10 qualifiers will be paired in 5 2-leg ties (to be played Oct 11-Nov 19, 2013), the winners of which will qualify for the finals

ASIA SECTION

● 4.5 finals places available

4th round draw

Group A
Iran
Lebanon
Qatar
South Korea
Uzbekistan

Group B
Australia
Iraq
Japan
Jordan
Oman

Games to be played June 3, 2012-June 18, 2013

● The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals
● The 2 3rd-placed teams will meet in a 2-leg play-off (Sep 6 & 10, 2013), the winners of which will meet the 5th-placed South American team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

CONCACAF SECTION

● 3.5 finals places available

3rd round draw

Group A
Antigua & Barbuda
Guatemala
Jamaica
United States

Group B
Costa Rica
El Salvador
Guyana
Mexico

Group C
Canada
Cuba
Honduras
Panama

Games to be played June 8-Oct 16, 2012

● The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 4th round

4th round

● The 6 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played Feb 6-Oct 15, 2013), with the top 3 qualifying for the finals
● The 4th-placed team will meet the Oceania section winners in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

EUROPE SECTION

● 13 finals places available

Draw

Group A
Belgium
Croatia
Macedonia
Scotland
Serbia
Wales

Group B
Armenia
Bulgaria
Czech Republic
Denmark
Italy
Malta

Group C
Austria
Faroe Islands
Germany
Kazakhstan
Republic of Ireland
Sweden

Group D
Andorra
Estonia
Holland
Hungary
Romania
Turkey

Group E
Albania
Cyprus
Iceland
Norway
Slovenia
Switzerland

Group F
Azerbaijan
Israel
Luxembourg
Northern Ireland
Portugal
Russia

Group G
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Slovakia

Group H
England
Moldova
Montenegro
Poland
San Marino
Ukraine

Group I
Belarus
Finland
France
Georgia
Spain

Games to be played Sep 7, 2012-Oct 15, 2013

● The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals
● The 8 runners-up with the best record will be paired in 4 2-leg play-offs (Nov 15 & 19, 2013), the winners of which will also qualify for the finals

OCEANIA SECTION

● 0.5 finals places available

2nd round draw

Group A
New Caledonia
Samoa
Tahiti
Vanuatu

Group B
Fiji
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Solomon Islands

Games to be played June 3-11, 2012

● The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round

● The 4 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played Sep 7, 2012-Mar 26, 2013), the winners of which will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

SOUTH AMERICA SECTION

● 5.5 finals places available, one of which goes automatically to hosts Brazil

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uruguay	3	2	1	0	9	3	7
Argentina	4	2	1	1	7	4	7
Venezuela	4	2	1	1	3	3	7
Ecuador	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Chile	4	2	0	2	7	10	6
Colombia	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Paraguay	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Peru	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Bolivia	4	0	1	3	4	8	1

Games being played Oct 7, 2011-Oct 15, 2013; each team will play 16 games (8x2)

● The top 4 will qualify for the finals
● The 5th-placed team will meet the winners of the Asia section play-off in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

KEY TO TABLES
(Q) = qualified for next round

BRAZIL

Getting off to a slow start

BRASILEIRO SERIE A

KEY DATES
Season starts
May 19, 2012
Season ends
December 2, 2012

Last year's Brazilian championship was the most dramatic in recent times, certainly since the current league format was introduced in 2003, with the key issues – the title, relegation places and Libertadores qualifiers – only being defined on the last Sunday.

Therefore, anticipation for the new campaign should be high – but in Brazil it is dampened by the 27 state championships which, from mid-January to mid-May, pit the country's top clubs in increasingly irrelevant games against tiny opposition.

In addition to spoiling the national championship, this also throws Brazil's domestic calendar out of sync with the rest of the world. With no break in a competition that runs from late May to the start of December, this means that the clubs lose out to international calls.

Last year, top players missed large chunks of the season when representing Brazil in the Copa America or the World Youth Cup. The same will happen for this year's Olympic tournament. And there is no space for a pause during FIFA dates, leaving national coach Mano Menezes in an awkward position – especially towards the end of the season, when losing a star name to the Brazil team could have serious consequences for a club side.

Moreover, the action runs straight through the opening of the July/August transfer window, with a plethora of new arrivals having little time to settle in their new surroundings.

Drawing up a domestic calendar as if the rest of the world did not exist also has psychological repercussions. The championship gets underway just as the Libertadores Cup gets serious. Six Brazilian clubs are involved in the continent's top-club competition and this tends to see them fielding weakened sides in domestic

Local rivals...Corinthians' Emerson Sheik (left) battles with Henrique of Palmeiras during a Sao Paulo state championship clash

matches. And even when they are knocked out, the resultant hangover often leads to a slump in league form. Alternatively, if a side goes on to win the Libertadores, they tend to coast through the championship - as Santos did last year - instead dreaming of December's Club World Cup against the European champions.

Those sides not in continental action contest the Brazilian Cup. Crowned in July, the winners have a guaranteed place in next year's Libertadores, so they are also liable to take their foot off the pedal in the league.

All of these factors make the Brazilian championship notoriously hard to predict. Indeed, Brazilians pride themselves on the fact that compared with major European leagues theirs is much more open.

The strong get stronger

However, inside this unpredictability, a pattern of predictability has emerged. A decade ago, things really were wide open. Sao Caetano, only formed in 1989, came from nowhere to become realistic title challengers and only lost in the Final of the 2002 Libertadores on a penalty shoot-out.

These days it is inconceivable that such a minnow could take wings. Two things have happened to prevent it. Firstly, since the adoption of the league format in 2003 the season is longer. Under the previous play-off system it was possible for a small team to travel far by catching form at the right time. The longer campaign calls for a deeper squad than the likes of Sao Caetano can afford – which takes us neatly to the second development. Nowadays there is much more money around.

A decade ago everyone was selling. The big clubs often suffered from their size, creating pressures from fans which the team lacked the quality to bear. Some of the giants were even relegated, before bouncing back stronger into a new era, one in which Brazil's consumer-led boom put them in a strong position.

Companies looking to reach newly affluent consumers queued up to do business with the big clubs, who can count their supporters in tens of millions.

A new TV deal has significantly increased the income of the big clubs, who may still have enormous debts but also have the resources to bring back players from Europe or hold on to their stars for longer. And so huge gaps are opening up between the big clubs and the rest.

Successful season...Coritiba's Davi

Unglamorous little Figueirense from Florianopolis did wonderfully well to finish seventh last year, and another southern club, Coritiba ended up one place behind. The rest of the top 12, though, were all the traditional powerhouses from Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre. It is hard to see the title eluding one of these teams or those from Belo Horizonte.

The idea of the clubs running their own league is clearly gaining force, and the state federations have been caught off balance

Everyone else may be dreaming of exceeding expectations, but the high end of their realistic aims would be sneaking into a Libertadores place. The low end would be avoiding relegation.

And for the league as a whole, the realistic aim should be clear: to compete on much more equal terms with the major European leagues. Its potential to do so has clearly been boosted by the end of Ricardo Teixeira's 23-year spell in charge of Brazil's FA, the CBF.

Teixeira's power base was never the clubs, but it is the presidents of the 27 state federations who currently hold the whip hand in the CBF. It is largely for this reason that the state championships continue to exist; without them the role and prestige of the federations would be severely diminished.

There has long been talk of the major clubs coming together to organise their own championship, an idea clearly based on England's Premier League. In Brazil the consequences of such a move would be even bigger, since it would affect not only the division of TV money but also the calendar and very structure of the game.

Such a move, however, is more difficult in Brazil than it was in England. When clubs are run as businesses it's easier for them to see each other as partners. But when the president is elected by club members, few things work as well as criticising local rivals.

The end of the Teixeira era has opened up an intense debate about the future of the Brazilian game. The idea of the clubs running their own league is clearly gaining force, and the bosses of the state federations have been caught off balance.

The public, too, seem to be voting with their feet, with crowd figures in many of the state championships down to farcical levels. One game in the Rio first division, for example, attracted 10 paying spectators. Attendances of under 100 are commonplace, with even the big clubs regularly playing in front of less than 1,500.

Influential journalist Juca Kfour has called for "the extinction of the state championships - or their reduction or even expansion, as long as the big clubs do not have to participate or only take part in the final stages of the competition".

It is a proposal that is gathering strength, but this will only become reality if the big clubs are truly prepared to act with courage, unity and imagination.

Tim Vickery

Dreaming of a title: Sao Caetano players celebrate after winning the 2002 Copa Libertadores

BRAZIL
Brasileiro Serie A: team by team

SOUTH-EAST REGION

The heartland of Brazilian football, with Rio and Sao Paulo as its main centres, and Belo Horizonte a candidate to be the game's third city. The south-east has won all the titles since the adoption of the league format in 2003, and all but eight since the national championship was launched in 1971.

SAO PAULO STATE

● CORINTHIANS
Won their fifth title last year, but defending it is bound to be distracted – in the early stages at least – by their quest to finally win the Libertadores Cup. Charismatic coach Tite has built a solid team, but one that is a little short of goal power. The gamble on Adriano failed and a big-name centre-forward may well be brought in during the transfer window.

● PALMEIRAS
These are awkward times for the four-times champions, who are the traditional club of Sao Paulo's Italian community. Unable to use their stadium, which is not due to re-open until next year, matters have not been helped by ever-turbulent off-the-field political disputes. The signs are, though, that Luiz Felipe Scolari is moving in the right direction. Brazil midfielder Wesley has joined from Werder Bremen after failing to settle in the Bundesliga, while Argentinian centre-forward Hernan Barcos also looks a good addition, and sights should certainly be set higher than last year's 11th place.

● SAO PAULO
Talented and temperamental hard-line coach Emerson Leao was brought back late last year to shake up a squad that had fallen from the heights of the three consecutive titles between 2006 and 2008. Six-times champions in all, the club has an enviable structure and a highly interesting attacking triumvirate, with Luis Fabiano flanked by Lucas and Jadson behind them setting up the play. The defensive unit needs work, but with no Libertadores distraction they are genuine title challengers and – a repeat of last year's sixth place would be a disaster.

● SANTOS
From the port close to Sao Paulo, the reigning Libertadores champions have punched above their weight to become Brazil's most famous club abroad, and will be desperate to add more titles in this, their centenary year. Coach Muricy Ramalho

Likely to stay...Neymar

has mounted an interesting reaction to December's humiliation at the hands of Barcelona and will presumably be looking for redemption at this year's Club World Cup, which means the focus will be on winning the Libertadores. In the league the club will surely suffer from call-ups to the Olympics and even if Neymar does not move on this year, the same might not be true of Paulo Henrique Ganso.

No passengers...Flamengo's Vagner Love (top) and Ronaldinho

● PORTUGUESA
Runaway winners of last year's second division, the club of Sao Paulo's Portuguese immigrants have since suffered from selling key members of the side and their form in the state championship has not been good. Coach Jorginho will look to Ricardo Jesus for goals and former Brazil under-20 midfielders Maylson and Boquita for spark. Narrowly missed out on winning the title in 1996, but this time they will be happy just to stay up.

● PONTE PRETA
Promoted after five years in the second division, this club from the city of Campinas, some 70 miles outside Sao Paulo, have a best-ever finish of third place in 1981, but will be satisfied with survival this time. Coach Gilson Kleina turned down Fluminense to stay with the club last year, but while he carried them up he will have his work cut out with a squad that looks thin for the first division.

RIO DE JANEIRO STATE

In the early years of the league format, the Rio press would often complain that only Sao Paulo clubs were strong enough to win the title. But the former capital is going through something of a resurgence, reflected in the much-improved performances of its teams, who were title winners in 2009 and 2010, and strong contenders last year.

● FLAMENGO
Six-times champions and Brazil's most popular club, whose ever-turbulent environment was evident at the start of the year when Vanderlei Luxemburgo was forced out and replaced by the more avuncular coach Joel Santana. The question is can he get the best out of the enigmatic Ronaldinho? His combination with newly re-acquired striker Vagner Love looks promising, while an interesting generation of youngsters is pushing for inclusion.

● FLUMINENSE
Twice champions who could be a good bet for a third, providing Fred and Deco stay fit and the club can cope with the distraction of the Libertadores. Little winger Wellington Nem, outstanding on loan with Figueirense last year, has returned to add still more attacking threat to coach Abel Braga's side, but a question mark remains against the defence.

● VASCO DA GAMA
Did outstandingly well last year, coming close to a fifth title despite coach Ricardo Gomes suffering a stroke. Assistant Cristovao Borges

Threat...Fluminense's Nem

stepped up in fine style but will he be content to move back down again should Gomes return? Vasco may well suffer from Olympic call-ups – a big problem for a squad that lacks the depth of some of the other contenders.

● BOTAFOGO
Champions in 1995 who fell back to ninth last year after threatening to fight for the title. Calm, experienced coach Osvaldo de Oliveira has been brought back from Japan to take charge and he has retained the 4-2-3-1 formation of predecessor

Caio Junior. The big fear is that talismanic Uruguay centre-forward Sebastian Abreu seems to be running out of steam.

MINAS GERAIS STATE

Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais state, was without a stadium last year. The giant Mineirao is still being patched up for the World Cup, but work on the Independencia, where the USA beat England in the 1950 World Cup, is close to conclusion. Having to travel out of town for home games had a disastrous effect on the local teams in 2011. America, the city's third force, were relegated, a fate that Atletico and Cruzeiro only avoided with a late rally. Much better will be expected this time.

● ATLETICO-MG

The first champions in 1971 but still waiting for their second title, Atletico have had a difficult few years, with a policy of bringing in star names often backfiring. However, hopes are higher this year. Coach Cuca usually produces attractive sides, and with Danilinho returning from Mexico to line up with Andre and Guilherme, there should be no shortage of firepower.

● CRUZEIRO

After an excellent start to 2011, the wheels fell off following a surprise exit from the Libertadores. In free fall, the club seemed to be changing coach every other week until Vagner Mancini steered them to safety. Striker Walter joins on loan from Porto, and a spine of goalkeeper Fabio, Uruguayan centre-back Mauricio Victorino and Argentinian playmaker Walter Montillo should keep the club competitive.

Dismissed...Dos Anjos

CENTRAL-WEST REGION

GOIANIA STATE

● ATLETICO-GO

Last year's 13th place was their best ever, since when the club have taken the mystifying decision to sack coach Helio dos Anjos. Centre-back Jairo Araujo has stepped up, initially on a caretaker basis – hardly ideal preparation for what threatens to be a difficult season.

NORTH-EAST REGION

The north-east is Brazil's underperformer. The big clubs can count on mass support, but it rarely translates into strength on the field. None of the region's clubs feature in the all-time top-15 point scorers since the national championship began in 1971. Perhaps investments in the 2014 World Cup will improve matters.

BAHIA STATE

● BAHIA

The 1988 champions have never otherwise finished in the top three, and last year, after seven seasons away, they only narrowly avoided going straight back down. This February they made a fascinating coaching appointment in Falcao, the 1982 World Cup maestro, who will attempt to get the best out of talented midfielders such as Morais, Lulinha and Ze Roberto, plus combative centre-forward Souza.

PERNAMBUCO STATE

● SPORT

The Recife club claim to have won the 1987 title, but it was in effect the second division after the big clubs broke away for a year. Otherwise, they have never been higher than fifth and now return to the top flight after a two-year absence. Inexperienced coach Mazola Junior has a tough task keeping them up.

In at Bahia...Falcao

● NAUTICO

Recife had a double celebration last year, with Nautico also promoted. Sixth place in 1984 is the only time they have ever been in the top 10, and methodical coach Waldemar Lemos – who is the brother of Botafogo boss Osvaldo de Oliveira – will have his calm tested in the quest to stop them going straight back down. Set to move into the new World Cup stadium next year.

SOUTH REGION

Porto Alegre, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, vies with Belo Horizonte to be considered the third city of Brazilian football. The game is appreciated with a Uruguayan fervour. Curitiba is an important sub-centre and a 2014 World Cup host city, while Florianopolis has recently been raising its football profile.

RIO GRANDE DO SUL STATE

● GREMIO

Twice champions, Gremio have gone through a succession of coaching changes under current president Paulo Odone, with the latest, Vanderlei Luxemburgo, appointed as recently as February. A real blow is the broken ankle suffered by talented striker Kleber, which places plenty of responsibility on the other new recruits, Bolivia centre-forward Marcelo Martins Moreno and Argentinian playmaker Facundo Bertoglio, on loan from Dynamo Kiev.

● INTERNACIONAL

Star attacking midfielder Oscar is currently in the throws of a legal battle with former club Sao Paulo, but even without him, Dorival Junior, one of Brazil's most interesting coaches, has a top-class squad at his disposal. They will probably suffer with Olympic call-ups and the Libertadores is also a distraction, but title number four cannot be ruled out.

Court battle...Oscar

PARANA STATE

● CORITIBA

Surprise champions in 1985, the club have had a solid two years, winning promotion and playing attractively to finish eighth last season. Coach Marcelo Oliveira will aim to keep up the good work with the aid of a sound youth policy, the addition of veteran playmaker Lincoln and the return of centre-forward Keirrison, who joins on loan from Barcelona for the next two years.

SANTA CATARINA STATE

● FIGUEIRENSE

The surprise of last season, finishing a best-ever seventh. coach Jorginho then left for Japan and replacement Branco, the former Brazil left-back, has a tough task in his first job. Plenty of key players have also moved on. Veteran striker Julio Cesar, so effective last year, remains and should form an interesting partnership with new recruit, Argentina's Franco Neill.

OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS
USA miss out on London 2012

Going for gold...El Salvador keep alive their dream of making it to London this summer for the Olympic finals by getting past the USA in the qualifying group stage

It had seemed that they were in an easy qualifying group, but the United States will not be taking part in the men's 2012 Olympic Games football tournament this summer after a dramatic injury-time goal for El Salvador secured a draw and sent the US crashing out of contention.

The USA had been favourites, along with Mexico, to qualify for London 2012 from the CONCACAF region. They began their group confidently enough, with a 6-0 victory over Cuba in the round-robin tournament held in Nashville. But a shock 2-0 reverse to Canada in the next game left them needing to beat El Salvador to reach the semi-final stage.

The USA under-23 side, captained by Freddy Adu and featuring other young talent such as Brek Shea, came up against a well-organised Canada team who denied the Americans space and snatched goals through Doneil Henry, from a corner, and Lucas Cavallini, with a late close-range header following a counter-attack.

Canada then slipped up in their final game, drawing 1-1 with Cuba, leaving the USA needing to beat El Salvador later that day to top the group and progress to the last four of the qualifying competition.

However, a goal in the 95th minute gave El Salvador a 3-3 draw and ended the USA's involvement in the qualifying contention. The US had taken a quick lead when forward Terrence Boyd scored after 62 seconds, but El Salvador stormed back with goals in the 35th and 38th minutes through Lester Blanco and Andres Flores.

First-choice US keeper Bill Hamid was at fault for the second El Salvador goal, an injury sustained minutes earlier preventing him from collecting a low cross in front of the goal. Soon after the goal he limped off, to be replaced by Sean Johnson.

The Americans responded brightly and regained the lead with quickfire goals in the 65th and 68th minutes from Boyd and Joe Corona, but could not hold on.

With five minutes of injury time played, El Salvador's Jaime Alas blasted a shot from 25 yards and the ball bounced off the hands of substitute keeper Johnson before spilling into the goal.

Uncertain future

This is only the second time the USA have failed to qualify for the Olympics since 1976, and coach Caleb Porter, whose future is now uncertain, found it hard to console his players.

"It's a painful moment," he said. "The players are devastated. To put in as much as they put in that game, the amount of heart they put in, to play the way they played in that second half to come from behind and score two goals, to be seconds away from getting the No1 seed, it's unimaginable.

Qualified...Ahmed Ali of the UAE

"I'm sad that I'm not going to get a chance to be in the trenches with those guys anymore. I'm proud of those guys and I know they're going to do great things in the future. But there's nothing to be ashamed of."

USA national coach Jurgen Klinsmann, who has overall control of all the country's international teams, was in Nashville to watch the debacle unfold. "We all feel really sorry for the guys," he said. "They had it. It was all there already and then comes this last-second moment. This is brutal because they worked really hard.

"The year slips away, a huge opportunity to shine in an Olympics. It's not coming back any more for them. That's how football is. It can catch you really brutally at specific moments.

"Obviously you want to get

the results done and be in big competitions like Olympics. But here is a very good group doing fantastic work, but they weren't consistent enough and it killed the situation.

"It's a learning experience now, at an early stage they have to handle a big disappointment, which is not easy. It doesn't kill them, it makes them stronger. But with things like the pace of the game, technical elements, it was very important for us to see we are on the right path for our style of play."

"They will have good moments to come. But I also said it was not lost on the night [against El Salvador], it was lost against Canada. One bad performance can kill you in a qualifying campaign.

"We are going to help them in their development. We will follow them week in week out no matter where they play. They need to know they have a coaching staff around that always has an eye on them."

El Salvador and Honduras were due to meet in one semi-final, with Canada facing Mexico in the other.

The only other remaining place at London 2012 will be decided by an Afro-Asian play-off in Coventry between Senegal and Oman.

2012 OLYMPIC FINALISTS

HOSTS
Great Britain
AFRICA
Gabon, Morocco, Egypt
ASIA
Japan, South Korea, UAE
CONCACAF
Two from Canada, Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador
EUROPE
Belarus, Spain, Switzerland
OCEANIA
New Zealand
SOUTH AMERICA
Brazil, Uruguay
PLAY-OFF WINNERS
Senegal or Oman

High hopes...Japan's Yuki Otsu (right)

On top...New Zealand's Adam McGeorge (in black) gets the better of Fiji's Esava Naqeleca

Automatic qualifiers

The three automatic qualifiers from the Asian region are South Korea, Japan and UAE, who won their respective qualifying groups.

Japan finished top of their group following a 2-0 victory over Bahrain, with Syria finishing in second place and entering a round-robin play-off against Uzbekistan and Oman.

Syria's progress, which was ended following a defeat by Uzbekistan, was all the more remarkable because their Olympic side was forced to play their home matches outside the country following the uprising against the rule of president Bashar al Assad.

Despite the forced exile and team defections, the squad contained players from across Syria, including Homs, the city at the centre of the uprising.

South Korea ended their qualifying campaign unbeaten and were helped by Qatar being punished for fielding an ineligible player in their 1-1 draw with Oman. The Omanis were awarded a 3-0 win, which helped them finish in second place in the group.

UAE won their group after they overturned a two-goal deficit to defeat Uzbekistan 3-2 in their final game. The Uzbeks had taken a 2-0 half-time lead at home to UAE in Tashkent but two second-half goals from Ahmed Khalil put group leaders UAE on course for London and Haboosh Saleh grabbed a late winner.

in the crucial final round-robin play-off match, Oman beat Uzbekistan 2-1 to top the play-off group and set up a meeting with Senegal on April 23.

New Zealand qualified for their second successive Olympic football tournament after they secured a 1-0 win over Fiji to claim victory in the seven-team Oceania qualifying tournament last month.

Greg Draper scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot after Ilisoni Tuinawaivuvu handled in the box in the first half.

Esava Nageleca and Zibraaz Sahib both headed against the bar for Fiji but New Zealand held on to win.

"It wasn't much of a football spectacle to be honest, it was more of an 11-on-11 scrap," said New Zealand's English coach, the former Millwall and Wolverhampton Wanderers player Neil Emblen.

New Zealand will join the hosts Great Britain; Brazil and Uruguay, who were the top two in the 2011 South American Under-20 championship; Gabon, Morocco and Egypt, the top three teams in the 2011 African Under-23 championship; and Spain, Switzerland and Uzbekistan, three of the four semi-finalists (along with England) in last summer's European Under-21 championship.

Brazil coach Mano Menezes will also take charge of the Olympic squad. Last month he named a 52-man preliminary squad. Kaka and Robinho were the most notable omissions, but the list included some well-known names, including Alexandre Pato, Paulo Henrique Ganso, Neymar, Dani Alves, Hulk, Ronaldinho, Thiago Silva, Luisao and Marcelo.

Each under-23 team can include three over-age players. WS

ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2012

European Sports Media

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions.

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are:

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TIPSbladet (Denmark)
World Soccer (England)

SEASON RANKING

Cummulative votes through the season (total votes cast from September 2011 to February 2012)

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	15 votes
Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)	9
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)	8
Joe Hart (Manchester City)	7
Christian Abbiati (Milan)	2
David De Gea (Manchester United)	2
Tim Krul (Newcastle United)	2
Victor Valdes (Barcelona)	2
Massimiliano Benassi (Lecce)	1
Thibaut Courtois (Atletico Madrid)	1
Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli)	1
Hugo Lloris (Lyon)	1
Pepe Reina (Liverpool)	1
Salvatore Sirigu (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal)	1
Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (Bor M'gladbach)	1
Javi Varas (Sevilla)	1
Tolga Zengin (Trabzonspor)	1
Ron-Robert Zieler (Hanover)	1

DEFENDERS

Dani Alves (Barcelona)	22
Vincent Kompany (Manchester City)	18
Thiago Silva (Milan)	13
Marcelo (Real Madrid)	12
Daniel Van Buyten (Bayern Munich)	9
Patrice Evra (Manchester United)	8
Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	8
Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich)	7
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Stefan Lichtsteiner (Juventus)	6
Phil Jones (Manchester United)	5
Carles Puyol (Barcelona)	5
Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus)	4
Dante (Borussia Monchengladbach)	4
Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich)	4
Joleon Lescott (Manchester City)	4
John Terry (Chelsea)	4
Nemanja Vidic (Manchester United)	4
Gerard Pique (Barcelona)	3
Lukasz Pisczek (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Eric Abidal (Barcelona)	2
Daniel Agger (Liverpool)	2
Mathieu Debuchy (Lille)	2
Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United)	2
Ledley King (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Lucio (Internazionale)	2
Rafinha (Bayern Munich)	2
Micah Richards (Manchester City)	2
Andre Santos (Arsenal)	2
Marcel Schmelzer (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Thomas Vermaelen (Arsenal)	2
Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid)	1
Andrea Barzagli (Juventus)	1
Michel Bastos (Lyon)	1
Henri Bedimo (Montpellier)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Jose Bosingwa (Chelsea)	1
Paolo Cannavaro (Napoli)	1
Ricardo Carvalho (Real Madrid)	1
Fabio Coentrao (Real Madrid)	1
Jose Enrique (Liverpool)	1
Paulo Jorge (APOEL Nicosia)	1
Aleksandar Kolarov (Manchester City)	1
Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal)	1
Filipe Luis (Atletico Madrid)	1
David Luiz (Chelsea)	1
Diego Lugano (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Maicon (Internazionale)	1
Nicolas Nkoulou (Marseille)	1
Kyriakos Papadopoulos (Schalke)	1
Pepe (Real Madrid)	1
Alvaro Pereira (Porto)	1
Adil Rami (Valencia)	1
Martin Skrtel (Liverpool)	1
Chris Smalling (Manchester United)	1
Nicolas Spolli (Catania)	1
Ron Vlaar (Feyenoord)	1
Kyle Walker (Tottenham)	1
Javier Zanetti (Internazionale)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Xavi (Barcelona)	24
David Silva (Manchester City)	11
Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid)	9
Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)	9
Marco Reus (Borussia Monchengladbach)	9
Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich)	9
Gareth Bale (Tottenham Hotspur)	8
Cesc Fabregas (Barcelona)	7
Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)	6
Shinji Kagawa (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Kevin-Prince Boateng (Milan)	5
Nani (Manchester United)	5
Javier Pastore (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich)	4
Juan Arango (Borussia Monchengladbach)	3
Mario Gotze (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich)	3
Alex Song (Arsenal)	3
Pablo Aimar (Benfica)	2
Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid)	2
Sergio Buquets (Barcelona)	2
Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid)	2
Ryan Giggs (Manchester United)	2
Claudio Marchisio (Juventus)	2
Luka Modric (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Antonio Nocerino (Milan)	2
Yaya Toure (Manchester City)	2
Charlie Adam (Liverpool)	1
Younes Belhanda (Montpellier)	1
Michael Carrick (Manchester United)	1
Patrick Herrmann (Borussia M'gladbach)	1
Kaka (Real Madrid)	1
Sebastian Kehl (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Frank Lampard (Chelsea)	1
Alessandro Matri (Milan)	1
Dries Mertens (PSV Eindhoven)	1
Jon Obi Mikel (Chelsea)	1
Samir Nasri (Manchester City)	1
Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Park Ji-sung (Manchester United)	1
Scott Parker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Simon Pepe (Juventus)	1
Ramires (Chelsea)	1
Mark Van Bommel (Milan)	1
Rafael Van der Vaart (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Theo Walcott (Arsenal)	1
Granit Xhaka (Basle)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	49
Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	34
Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)	33
Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)	12
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	8
Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)	7
Juan Mata (Chelsea)	6
Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)	5
Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli)	4
Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)	3
Alexis Sanchez (Barcelona)	3
Roberto Soldado (Valencia)	3
Mario Balotelli (Manchester City)	2
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	2
Edinson Cavani (Napoli)	2
Falcao (Atletico Madrid)	2
Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Demba Ba (Newcastle United)	1
Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)	1
Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)	1
Miroslav Klose (Lazio)	1
Leandro Lima (Braga)	1
Alessandro Matri (Juventus)	1
Diego Milito (Internazionale)	1
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	1
Raul (Schalke)	1
Francesco Totti (Roma)	1

More details of votes
at worldsoccer.com/esm
or bit.ly/GQqVrs

AUSTRIA

Rapid overtaken

Salzburg overtook Rapid at the top of the table after beating them 3-1 at the Red Bull Arena. Five points now separated the first four, with the top three gaining European places.

BELARUS

Super Cup double

Vyacheslav Hleb, the younger brother of former Arsenal and Barcelona winger Alexander Hleb, scored both goals as Gomel beat BATE 2-0 in the Belarus Super Cup.

BELGIUM

Lokeren off to Europe

Tunisian striker Hamdi Harbaoui scored the only goal of the Belgian Cup Final as Lokeren beat Kortrijk. Lokeren won the trophy for the first time in their history despite having Benjamin De Ceulaer sent off after just 20 minutes.

"We've proved before that we can play with good organisation despite going a man down," said victorious coach Peter Maes, whose side booked a spot in next season's Europa League play-off round.

Cup success...Lokeren

7-0 **Bayern Munich's victory against Basle was the biggest-ever winning margin in the Champions League knockout phase**

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round

2nd legs

Mar 6

Arsenal (Eng) 3 (Koscielny 7, Rosicky 26, Van Persie pen 43)
Milan (Ita) 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 59,973. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Milan 4-3 on agg
Arsenal: Szczesny - Sagna, Koscielny, Vermaelen, Gibbs, Rosicky, Song, Oxlade-Chamberlain (Chamakh 75), Walcott (Park 84), Van Persie, Gervinho.
Milan: Abbiati - Abate, Mexes, Thiago Silva, Mesbah (Bonera 90), Nocerino, Van Bommel, Emanuelson, El Shaarawy (Aquilani 70), Ibrahimovic, Robinho.

Mar 6

Benfica (Por) 2 (Pereira 45+1, Nelson Oliveira 90+3)
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,909. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Benfica 4-3 on agg
Benfica: Artur - Pereira, Luisao, Jardel, Emerson, Javi Garcia, Bruno Cesar, Witsel, Gaitan (Matic 72), Rodrigo (Nolito 62), Cardozo (Nelson Oliveira 80).
Zenit: Malafeev - Anyukov (Bruno Alves 53), Hubocan, Lombaerts, Criscito, Denisov, Bystrov (Lazovic 46), Shirokov, Zyryanov (Fayzulin 70), Semak, Kerzhakov.

Mar 7

APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) 1 (Manduca 9)
Lyon (Fra) 0
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90mins:** 1-0. **Att:** 22,701.
Ref: Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Agg 1-1, APOEL 4-3 on pens
APOEL: Chiotis - Poursaitidis, Marcelo Oliveira, Paulo Jorge, Boaventura, Nuno Morais, Helder Sousa (Alexandrou 94), Charalambides (Marcinho 77), Manduca, Ailton, Solari (Trickovski 74).
Sent off: Manduca 115min.
Lyon: Lloris - Reveillere, Kone, Cris, Cissokho, Gonalons, Kallstrom, Briand (Lacazette 100), Ederson (Gomis 73), Michel Bastos, Lopez.

Mar 7

Barcelona (Spa) 7 (Messi 25, 42, 49, 58, 84, Tello 55, 62)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Bellarabi 90+1)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 75,632. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Barcelona 10-2 on agg
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique, Mascherano, Adriano (Muniesa 63), Busquets, Xavi (Keita 53), Fabregas, Iniesta (Tello 53), Pedro, Messi.
Leverkusen: Leno - Castro, Schwaab, Toprak, Kadlec, Reinartz, Rolfes, Bender (Schurrle 55), Renato Augusto (Oczipka 67), Kiessling, Derdiyok (Bellarabi 55).

Mar 13

Bayern Munich (Ger) 7 (Robben 11, 81, Muller 42, Gomez 44, 50, 61, 67)
Basle (Swi) 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 66,000. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Bayern 7-1 on agg
Bayern: Neuer - Lahm, Boateng, Badstuber, Alaba, Luiz Gustavo, Kroos, Robben (Tymoshchuk 82), Muller (Schweinsteiger 70), Ribery (Pranjic 79), Gomez.
Basle: Sommer - Steinhofer (Degen 70), Abraham, Dragovic, Park, G Xhaka, Cabral, Shaqiri (Zoua 80), F Frei (Stocker 62), A Frei, Streller.

Mar 13

Internazionale (Ita) 2 (Milito 75, Pazzini pen 90+6)
Marseille (Fra) 1 (Brandao 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 62,632. **Ref:** Proenca (Por)
Agg 2-2, Marseille on away goals
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Samuel, Nagatomo, Zanetti, Stankovic, Poli (Cambiasso 74), Sneijder (Obi 58), Milito, Forlan (Pazzini 58).
Marseille: Mandanda - Azpilicueta, Diawara, N'Koulou, Morel, Diarra, Mbia, Amalfitano, Valbuena (Cheyrou 76), A Ayew (Bracigliano 90+5), Remy (Brandao 88). *Sent off: Mandanda 90+3min.*

Mar 14

Chelsea (Eng) 4 (Drogba 29, Terry 47, Lampard pen 75, Ivanovic 105)
Napoli (Ita) 1 (Inler 55)
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90mins:** 3-1. **Att:** 37,784.
Ref: Brych (Ger)
Chelsea 5-4 on agg
Chelsea: Cech - Ivanovic, David Luiz, Terry (Bosingwa 98), Cole, Essien, Lampard, Sturridge (Fernando Torres 63), Mata (Malouda 95), Ramires, Drogba.
Napoli: De Sanctis - Campagnaro, Cannavaro, Aronica (Vargas 110), Maggio (Dossena 37), Inler, Gargano, Zuniga, Hamsik (Pandev 106), Lavezzi, Cavani.

Mar 14

Real Madrid (Spa) 4 (Higuain 26, Cristiano Ronaldo 55, 90+4, Benzema 70)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 1 (Tosic 77)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 67,743. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)
Real Madrid 5-2 on agg
Real Madrid: Casillas - Arbeloa, Pepe, Sergio Ramos, Marcelo, Khedira, Xabi Alonso, Ozil (Diarra 88), Kaka (Granero 76), Cristiano Ronaldo, Higuain (Benzema 69).
CSKA: Chepchugov - A Berezutsky, V Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Schennikov, Musa (Oliseh 60), Wernbloom, Aldonin (Mamaev 46), Tosic (Necid 81), Dzagoev, Doumbia.

EUROPA LEAGUE

2nd knockout round

1st legs - Mar 8; 2nd legs - Mar 15

Atletico Madrid (Spa) v Besiktas (Tur)
3-1, 3-0 (agg 6-1)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) v Udinese (Ita)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Manchester United (Eng) v Athletic Bilbao (Spa)
2-3, 1-2 (agg 3-5)
Metalist Kharkiv (Ukr) v Olympiakos (Gre)
0-1, 2-1 (agg 2-2, Metalist on away goals)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Manchester City (Eng)
1-0, 2-3 (agg 3-3, Sporting on away goals)
Standard Liege (Blg) v Hanover (Ger)
2-2, 0-4 (agg 2-6)
Twente Enschede (Hol) v Schalke (Ger)
1-0, 1-4 (agg 2-4)
Valencia (Spa) v PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
4-2, 1-1 (agg 5-3)

SETANTA CUP

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Mar 5; 2nd legs - Mar 20

Crusaders (Nlr) v Bohemians (Rlr)
0-0, 2-0 (agg 2-0)
Linfield (Nlr) v Derry City (Rlr)
1-1, 1-3 (agg 2-4)
Shamrock Rovers (Rlr) v Cliftonville (Nlr)
2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2, Shamrock 3-1 on pens)
Sligo Rovers (Rlr) v Glentoran (Nlr)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)

Semi-finals draw

Crusaders v Sligo Rovers
Shamrock Rovers v Derry City
1st legs - Apr 16; 2nd legs - Apr 23

ALBANIA

ALBANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Skenderbeu	18	12	5	1	34	11	41
Tirana	18	12	4	2	26	14	40
Teuta	18	11	4	3	21	12	37
Kastrioti	18	9	4	5	31	21	31
Flamurtari	18	8	6	4	25	14	30
Vllaznia	18	7	3	8	27	23	24
Bylis	18	6	5	7	31	29	23
Shkumbini	18	6	5	7	24	29	23
Laci*	18	7	5	6	16	20	20
Kamza	18	5	3	10	13	20	18
Tomori	18	5	2	11	20	33	17
Pogradeci**	18	5	2	11	15	30	14
Apolonia	18	2	5	11	16	32	11
Dinamo†	18	2	5	11	12	23	8

Standings on Mar 27
26-round season (13x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs
**6pts deducted because of crowd trouble*
***3pts deducted because of crowd trouble*
†3pts deducted for failing to pay a player

AUSTRIA

Mar 3: Rapid 1 Ried 0; Wacker 0 Austria 1; Admira 2 Wiener Neustadt 0; Salzburg 0 Mattersburg 1.
Mar 4: Kapfenberger 0 Sturm 0.
Mar 7: Wacker 1 Salzburg 1; Admira 3 Kapfenberger 1.
Mar 10: Sturm 0 Wiener Neustadt 1; Ried 3 Kapfenberger 0; Salzburg 3 Rapid 1; Mattersburg 0 Wacker 1.
Mar 11: Austria 2 Admira 1.
Mar 14: Kapfenberger 1 Wiener Neustadt 0.
Mar 17: Kapfenberger 0 Salzburg 1; Wacker 0 Ried 0; Rapid 1 Mattersburg 1; Wiener Neustadt 0 Austria 0.
Mar 18: Admira 2 Sturm 0.
Mar 20: Mattersburg 2 Austria 0.
Mar 21: Salzburg 2 Wiener Neustadt 1; Sturm 1 Wacker 0; Rapid 3 Kapfenberger 0; Ried 2 Admira 1.
Mar 24: Kapfenberger 1 Mattersburg 1; Wiener Neustadt 1 Ried 1; Admira 2 Salzburg 2; Austria 1 Sturm 1.
Mar 25: Wacker 2 Rapid 1.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	27	12	9	6	42	26	45
Rapid	27	10	12	5	37	25	42
Ried	27	10	10	7	36	28	40
Austria	27	10	10	7	40	35	40
Admira	27	10	8	9	42	38	38
Sturm	27	9	10	8	36	32	37
Wacker	27	8	12	7	26	29	36
Mattersburg	27	7	10	10	32	31	31
W Neustadt	27	6	11	10	20	33	29
Kapfenberger	27	4	6	17	17	51	18

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

BELGIUM

Regular season

Mar 3: Mechelen 0 Gent 2; Kortrijk 3 Genk 2; Mons 4 Beerschot 2; St Truiden 1 Zulte Waregem 0; OH Leuven 0 Lierse 0; Lokeren 4 Westerlo 0.
Mar 4: Club Brugge 1 Standard 0; Anderlecht 4 Cercle Brugge 0.
Mar 18: Standard 4 OH Leuven 0; Gent 3 Kortrijk 1; Beerschot 2 Lokeren 2; St Truiden 2 Anderlecht 2; Zulte Waregem 2 Mechelen 0; Lierse 1 Mons 1; Westerlo 3 Genk 2; Cercle Brugge 1 Club Brugge 2.
Mar 21: Club Brugge 1 Lierse 0; Anderlecht 2 Zulte Waregem 1; Genk 3 Gent 1; OH Leuven 3 St Truiden 1; Lokeren 1 Cercle Brugge 0; Kortrijk 2 Beerschot 0; Mechelen 1 Standard 2; Mons 2 Westerlo 1.

BELGIUM – REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	30	20	7	3	61	26	67
Club Brugge	30	19	4	7	51	32	61
Gent	30	17	5	8	63	35	56
Standard	30	14	9	7	43	33	51
Genk	30	13	7	10	60	44	46
Kortrijk	30	13	7	10	39	36	46
Cercle Brugge	30	13	7	10	36	37	46
Lokeren	30	11	11	8	48	40	44
Mechelen	30	10	7	13	40	50	37
Mons	30	9	9	12	50	55	36
Beerschot	30	9	9	12	45	51	36
Lierse	30	6	13	11	24	36	31
Z Waregem	30	6	12	12	32	38	30
OH Leuven	30	7	8	15	38	58	29
Westerlo	30	5	5	20	29	59	20
St Truiden	30	3	10	17	32	61	19

Top 6 enter championship play-offs, 7th to 14th enter Europa League place play-offs, 15th & 16th (bottom 2) enter relegation play-off series (1 of them will go down)

Fastest ever...Manolov

BULGARIA
Quick off the mark
Miroslav Manolov scored the Bulgarian league's quickest-ever goal after just six seconds of Cherno More's 3-1 win at Montana. He went on to complete a hat-trick.

CZECH REPUBLIC
Derby run finishes
Sparta Prague's run of five successive derby successes ended with a 1-1 draw at Slavia Prague.

Slovan Liberec's 3-0 victory against Bohemians 1905 meant they moved within one point of Sparta at the top of the table.

ENGLAND
Tevez returns
Argentina striker Carlos Tevez made his first senior appearance for Manchester City since September last year – when he refused to warm up as a substitute against Bayern Munich – in the 2-1 victory over Chelsea at the Etihad Stadium. The win extended City's run of consecutive home wins to 20.

City, however, have slipped to second place in

15 years since two Englishmen were on the scoresheet for Arsenal, after Theo Walcott and Kieran Gibbs scored against Aston Villa

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zeljeznicar	18	14	2	2	40	10	44
Siroki Brijeg	18	10	6	2	26	8	36
Sarajevo	18	10	3	5	29	16	33
Borac	18	10	3	5	26	16	33
Zrinjski	18	8	7	3	29	21	31
Olimpik	18	9	3	6	25	15	30
Zvijezda	18	7	5	6	22	19	26
Velez	18	6	6	6	19	19	24
Celik	18	6	6	6	20	22	24
Sloboda	18	6	2	10	12	28	20
GOSK	18	4	7	7	12	16	19
Rudar	18	5	3	10	15	28	18
Leotar	18	4	4	10	14	22	16
Travnik	18	4	4	10	22	35	16
Kozara	18	3	6	9	10	18	15
Slavija	18	4	1	13	16	44	13

Standings on Mar 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

BULGARIA

Mar 3: Botev 0 Slavia 1; Ludogorets 3 Beroe 0; Kaliakra 2 Montana 3; Lovech 3 Vidima-Rakovski 0.
Mar 4: Levski 2 Cherno More 1; Minyor 3 Svetkavitsa 0; Chernomorets 2 CSKA 0.
Mar 5: Lokomotiv Sofia 2 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 0.
Mar 7: Kaliakra 0 Lovech 2.
Mar 9: Beroe 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 0.
Mar 10: Vidima-Rakovski 0 Ludogorets 5; Lokomotiv Plovdiv 2 Chernomorets 0; Svetkavitsa 1 Lovech 3.
Mar 11: CSKA 3 Kaliakra 1; Montana 0 Levski 3; Slavia 2 Minyor 1.
Mar 12: Cherno More 1 Botev 0.
Mar 16: Lokomotiv Sofia 0 Vidima-Rakovski 1.
Mar 17: Minyor 0 Cherno More 1; Lovech 1 Slavia 0; Chernomorets 2 Beroe 2.
Mar 18: Ludogorets 5 Svetkavitsa 0; Botev 0 Levski 2; Kaliakra 1 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 2.
Mar 19: CSKA 2 Montana 0.
Mar 20: Vidima-Rakovski 0 Minyor 3.
Mar 21: Lokomotiv Plovdiv 1 Ludogorets 0; Slavia 0 Levski 3; Kaliakra 0 Chernomorets 4; Beroe 1 Lovech 1.
Mar 22: Svetkavitsa 0 Botev 0; Montana 1 Cherno More 3; CSKA 4 Lokomotiv Sofia 0.
Mar 24: Vidima-Rakovski 0 Chernomorets 1; Slavia 3 Ludogorets 2; Beroe 3 Kaliakra 1.
Mar 25: Montana 2 Botev 0; Levski 0 Minyor 1; Svetkavitsa 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 1; Lokomotiv Plovdiv 0 CSKA 3; Cherno More 0 Lovech 1.

BULGARIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA	20	15	3	2	44	13	48
Ludogorets	20	14	3	3	48	11	45
Levski	20	15	0	5	36	18	45
Chernomorets	20	13	4	3	34	9	43
Lovech	20	12	5	3	35	16	41
Slavia	20	11	3	6	30	27	36
Lok Plovdiv	20	11	3	6	27	24	36
Cherno More	20	10	4	6	23	11	34
Minyor	20	6	6	8	22	21	24
Beroe	20	5	5	10	20	30	20
Montana	20	5	5	10	18	34	20
Lok Sofia	20	4	5	11	19	33	17
Botev	20	3	6	11	12	26	15
V-Rakovski	20	3	4	13	9	37	13
Kaliakra	20	1	4	15	14	41	7
Svetkavitsa	20	0	4	16	5	45	4

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

CROATIA

Mar 2: Inter 0 Slaven 1; Zagreb 2 Hajduk 4.
Mar 3: Zadar 0 Sibenik 1; Istra 2 Varazdin 1; Split 1 Lucko 1; Cibalia 2 Karlovac 0; Dinamo 1 Osijek 0.
Mar 4: Rijeka 0 Lokomotiva 0.
Mar 9: Sibenik 2 Rijeka 2.
Mar 10: Zadar 2 Inter 1; Lokomotiva 0 Istra 2; Varazdin 2 Zagreb 3; Karlovac 0 Slaven 0; Lucko 0 Dinamo 4; Hajduk 0 Split 0.
Mar 11: Osijek 1 Cibalia 2.
Mar 16: Inter 4 Karlovac 0; Zagreb 0 Lokomotiva 0; Slaven 2 Osijek 0.
Mar 17: Cibalia 1 Lucko 3; Istra 2 Sibenik 1; Split 2 Varazdin 2; Dinamo 2 Hajduk 1.
Mar 18: Rijeka 0 Zadar 1.
Mar 20: Zagreb 2 Osijek 2.
Mar 21: Inter 1 Cibalia 1; Split 3 Karlovac 1; Istra 2 Lucko 0; Zadar 2 Varazdin 0; Sibenik 0 Lokomotiva 1; Rijeka 0 Hajduk 3; Dinamo 2 Slaven 0.
Mar 24: Zadar 0 Istra 0; Sibenik 2 Zagreb 1; Lucko 1 Slaven 1; Osijek 1 Karlovac 1; Lokomotiva 1 Split 0; Varazdin 0 Dinamo 4.
Mar 25: Rijeka 1 Inter 0; Hajduk 1 Cibalia 0.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	23	19	3	1	55	8	60
Hajduk	23	14	5	4	43	17	47
Slaven	23	11	6	6	28	21	39
Split	23	10	7	6	35	28	37
Lokomotiva	23	10	6	7	25	18	36
Cibalia	23	9	6	8	23	27	33
Rijeka	23	8	8	7	25	21	32
Zadar	23	9	5	9	23	31	32
Osijek	23	8	7	8	31	31	31
Istra	23	8	7	8	24	24	31
Zagreb	23	8	6	9	27	35	30
Inter	23	8	4	11	24	27	28
Sibenik	23	6	6	11	24	26	24
Lucko	23	4	8	11	19	30	20
Karlovac*	23	4	5	14	17	46	16
Varazdin**	23	2	3	18	16	49	8

30-round season (15x2); bottom 5 will be relegated
**1pt deducted for failing to appear for game away to Rijeka (awarded 3-0 to the hosts)*
***1pt deducted for failing to play home game against Rijeka (awarded 3-0 to the visitors)*

CYPRUS

Regular season
Mar 3: Aris 2 Olympiakos 3; ENP 0 Nea Salamina 2; Ermis 1 APOEL 4; Alki 2 Apollon 1.
Mar 4: AEL 2 AEK 0; Omonia 1 Ethnikos 1.
Mar 5: Anorthosis 1 Anagennisi 0.
Mar 10: Anagennisi 2 Ermis 1; Nea Salamina 1 Omonia 4.
Mar 11: Apollon 1 Aris 2; AEK 1 Anorthosis 1; Ethnikos 2 Alki 0; Olympiakos 0 AEL 0.
Mar 12: APOEL 1 ENP 0.
Mar 17: Anorthosis 2 Olympiakos 1; Alki 0 Nea Salamina 1; Anagennisi 1 APOEL 2; Omonia 1 ENP 0; Aris 1 Ethnikos 4.
Mar 18: AEL 3 Apollon 0 (awarded); Ermis 0 AEK 1.
Mar 23: APOEL 0 Omonia 0.
Mar 24: Olympiakos 3 Ermis 1; AEK 2 Anagennisi 0.
Mar 25: Nea Salamina 2 Aris 0; Apollon 1 Anorthosis 1; ENP 2 Alki 0; Ethnikos 0 AEL 1.

CYPRUS – REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEL	26	18	6	2	33	7	60
Omonia	26	17	6	3	47	16	57
APOEL	26	17	5	4	39	13	56
Anorthosis	26	15	7	4	30	12	52
AEK	26	11	9	6	33	21	42
Nea Salamina	26	10	6	10	33	41	36
Apollon	26	10	4	12	31	39	34
Alki	26	10	4	12	32	40	34
Olympiakos	26	7	9	10	29	34	30
ENP	26	8	5	13	17	24	29
Ethnikos	26	7	8	11	21	23	29
Aris	26	7	6	13	27	35	27
Anagennisi (R)	26	2	5	19	16	45	11
Ermis (R)	26	1	4	21	12	50	7

Top 4 form championship group, 5th to 8th form "placement" group, 9th to 12th form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down), 13th & 14th (bottom 2) relegated automatically

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mar 2: Dukla 2 Slovacko 0; Teplice 1 Liberec 0.
Mar 3: Pribram 0 Hradec Kralove 0; Sparta 1 Plzen 3.
Mar 4: Jablonec 1 Ceske Budejovice 1; Mlada Boleslav 3 Slavia 2; Olomouc 2 Zizkov 1.
Mar 5: Bohemians 1905 0 Ostrava 1.
Mar 9: Zizkov 0 Sparta 2.
Mar 10: Ostrava 1 Ceske Budejovice 1; Slovacko 3 Bohemians 1905 2; Liberec 2 Mlada Boleslav 1.
Mar 11: Plzen 0 Olomouc 4; Hradec Kralove 0 Dukla 2; Slavia 0 Jablonec 0.
Mar 12: Pribram 0 Teplice 0.
Mar 16: Sparta 2 Ostrava 0.
Mar 17: Jablonec 0 Plzen 2; Olomouc 2 Liberec 4; Teplice 0 Zizkov 0.
Mar 18: Ceske Budejovice 2 Slovacko 2; Mlada Boleslav 2 Pribram 2; Bohemians 1905 0 Hradec Kralove 0.
Mar 19: Dukla 0 Slavia 0.
Mar 23: Pribram 2 Dukla 2.
Mar 24: Slavia 1 Sparta 1; Liberec 3 Bohemians 1905 0; Slovacko 1 Ostrava 0.
Mar 25: Hradec Kralove 2 Mlada Boleslav 0; Zizkov 4 Jablonec 2; Teplice 3 Olomouc 1.
Mar 26: Plzen 4 Ceske Budejovice 0.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta	22	16	2	4	40	17	50
Liberec	22	15	4	3	52	24	49
Plzen	22	13	4	5	52	31	43
M Boleslav	22	11	5	6	37	27	38
Jablonec	22	9	6	7	45	28	33
Teplice	22	9	6	7	25	24	33
Dukla	22	8	8	6	30	23	32
Pribram	22	9	5	8	32	34	32
Slovacko	22	9	3	10	22	26	30
H Kralove	22	7	6	9	17	25	27
Slavia	22	5	10	7	18	24	25
C Budejovice	22	4	8	10	24	41	20
Boh'ians 1905	22	5	5	12	16	39	20
Olomouc*	22	6	8	8	25	28	17
Ostrava	22	3	6	13	17	35	15
Zizkov	22	3	2	17	16	42	11

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated
**9pts deducted for match-fixing*

DENMARK

Mar 3: AGF 1 Nordsjaelland 1.
Mar 4: Midtjylland 1 Lyngby 2; Brondby 1 SonderjyskE 0; Horsens 2 HB Koge 1; AaB 1 Copenhagen 1.
Mar 5: OB 2 Silkeborg 2.
Mar 10: OB 0 Nordsjaelland 1.
Mar 11: AaB 1 Lyngby 0; Silkeborg 0 HB Koge 1; Copenhagen 2 SonderjyskE 0; Brondby 0 AGF 0.
Mar 12: Midtjylland 4 Horsens 1.
Mar 17: AGF 1 Horsens 3.
Mar 18: Lyngby 1 OB 0; Nordsjaelland 1 Brondby 2; SonderjyskE 2 Silkeborg 4; Copenhagen 0 Midtjylland 0.
Mar 19: HB Koge 1 AaB 1.
Mar 24: AaB 1 SonderjyskE 2.
Mar 25: OB 2 HB Koge 4; Horsens 0 Nordsjaelland 2; Silkeborg 0 Copenhagen 0; Brondby 2 Lyngby 1.
Mar 26: Midtjylland 0 AGF 2.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	22	13	6	3	34	17	45
Nordsjaelland	22	13	3	6	30	16	42
Horsens	22	10	5	7	36	30	35
AGF	22	8	10	4	28	20	34
Midtjylland	22	10	4	8	32	31	34
Silkeborg	22	8	7	7	34	30	31
AaB	22	8	7	7	31	29	31
Brondby	22	7	7	8	25	25	28
OB	22	7	5	10	36	38	26
SonderjyskE	22	6	6	10	25	36	24
Lyngby	22	5	3	14	21	37	18
HB Koge	22	3	5	14	23	46	14

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Saturday, March 3
Blackburn 1 (Dunn 85)
Aston Villa 1 (N'Zogbia 24) Att: 20,717

Liverpool 1 (Koscielny og 23)
Arsenal 2 (Van Persie 31, 90+2) Att: 44,922

Manchester City 2 (Steinsson og 23, Balotelli 69)
Bolton 0 Att: 47,219

Queens Park Rangers 1 (Zamora 36)
Everton 1 (Drenthe 31) Att: 18,033

Stoke 1 (Etherington 72)
Norwich 0 Att: 27,483

West Bromwich 1 (McAuley 82)
Chelsea 0 Att: 24,838

Wigan 0
Swansea 2 (Sigurdsson 45+2, 54) Att: 19,001

Sunday, March 4
Fulham 5 (Pogrebnyak 36, 44, 61, Dempsey 56, 83)
Wolverhampton 0 Att: 24,034

Newcastle 1 (Ameobi 90+1)
Sunderland 1 (Bendtner pen 24) Att: 52,388

Tottenham 1 (Defoe 87)
Manchester United 3 (Rooney 45, Young 60, 69) Att: 36,034

Saturday, March 10
Aston Villa 1 (Weimann 90+2)
Fulham 0 Att: 32,372

Bolton 2 (Pratley 37, Klasnic 86)
Queens Park Rangers 1 (Cisse 48) Att: 21,551

Chelsea 1 (Drogba 68)
Stoke 0 Att: 40,945

Back...Tevez (right)

the table, behind arch-rivals Manchester United, for whom Alex Ferguson has now surpassed Matt Busby's record of 985 league games as United manager.

Steven Gerrard marked his 400th Premier League appearance for Liverpool with all three goals in his side's 3-0 victory over Everton. It was the first hat-trick in a Merseyside derby at Anfield since 1935.

ESTONIA

Flora make it seven

Reigning league champions Flora won their seventh Estonian Super Cup title beating Trans 4-0.

FRANCE

OM shamed

Non-league Quevilly knocked Marseille out of the French Cup, winning 3-2 to claim their place in the semi-finals and inflicting a seventh straight defeat on the Champions League quarter-finalists.

"I'm left with a feeling of shame," said Marseille coach Didier Deschamps. "I'm thinking about all those poor people who came to watch us today and who support us.

"Our pride has taken a blow. It's hard to accept."

Shock...Quevilly's Julien Valero

Everton 1 (Jelavic 22)
Tottenham 0 Att: 34,992

Sunderland 1 (Bendtner 56)
Liverpool 0 Att: 41,661

Wolverhampton 0
Blackburn 2 (Hoilett 43, 69) Att: 26,121

Sunday, March 11
Manchester United 2 (Rooney 35, pen 71)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 75,598

Norwich 1 (Hoolahan 10)
Wigan 1 (Moses 68) Att: 26,653

Swansea 1 (Moore 83)
Manchester City 0 Att: 20,510

Monday, March 12
Arsenal 2 (Van Persie 15, Vermaelen 90+5)
Newcastle 1 (Ben Arfa 14) Att: 60,095

Tuesday, March 13
Liverpool 3 (Gerrard 34, 51, 90+3)
Everton 0 Att: 44,921

Saturday, March 17
Fulham 0
Swansea 3 (Sigurdsson 36, 66, Allen 77)
Att: 25,690

Wigan 1 (McArthur 54)
West Bromwich 1 (Scharner 65) Att: 21,379

Sunday, March 18
Newcastle 1 (Cisse 11)
Norwich 0 Att: 47,833

Wolverhampton 0
Manchester United 5 (Evans 21, Valencia 43, Welbeck 45+1, Hernandez 56, 61) Att: 27,494

Tuesday, March 20
Blackburn 2 (Hoilett 58, Yakubu 86)
Sunderland 0 Att: 20,056

Wednesday, March 21
Everton 0
Arsenal 1 (Vermaelen 8) Att: 30,330

Manchester City 2 (Aguero pen 78, Nasri 85)
Chelsea 1 (Cahill 60) Att: 46,324

Queens Park Rangers 3 (Derry 77, Cisse 86, Mackie 90+1)
Liverpool 2 (Coates 54, Kuyt 72) Att: 18,033

Tottenham 1 (Van der Vaart 90+3)
Stoke 1 (Jerome 75) Att: 35,172

Saturday, March 24
Arsenal 3 (Gibbs 16, Walcott 25, Arteta 90+3)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 60,108

Bolton 2 (Wheater 29, 35)
Blackburn 1 (Nzonzi 56) Att: 26,901

Chelsea 0
Tottenham 0 Att: 41,830

Liverpool 1 (Suarez 47)
Wigan 2 (Maloney pen 30, Caldwell 63) Att: 44,431

Norwich 2 (Holt 26, pen 45+1)
Wolverhampton 1 (Jarvis 25) Att: 26,752

Stoke 1 (Crouch 59)
Manchester City 1 (Y Toure 76) Att: 27,535

Sunderland 3 (Bendtner 41, McClean 70, Sessegnon 76)
Queens Park Rangers 1 (Taiwo 79) Att: 37,128

Swansea 0
Everton 2 (Baines 59, Jelavic 76) Att: 20,509

Sunday, March 25
West Bromwich 1 (Long 52)
Newcastle 3 (Cisse 6, 34, Ben Arfa 12) Att: 25,049

Monday, March 26
Manchester United 1 (Rooney 42)
Fulham 0 Att: 75,570

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man United	30	23	4	3	74	27	73
Man City	30	22	4	4	72	22	70
Arsenal	30	18	4	8	61	39	58
Tottenham	30	16	7	7	53	35	55
Chelsea	30	14	8	8	49	34	50
Newcastle	30	14	8	8	44	42	50
Liverpool	30	11	9	10	36	31	42
Sunderland	30	11	7	12	39	34	40
Everton	30	11	7	12	30	32	40
Swansea	30	10	9	11	34	36	39
Norwich	30	10	9	11	41	47	39
Stoke	30	10	8	12	29	41	38
Fulham	30	9	9	12	37	41	36
West Brom	30	10	6	14	36	41	36
Aston Villa	29	7	12	10	31	38	33
Blackburn	30	7	7	16	43	62	28
Bolton	29	8	2	19	33	58	26
QPR	30	6	7	17	33	53	25
Wigan	30	5	10	15	27	55	25
Wolves	30	5	7	18	31	65	22

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers
26 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)
21 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
17 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
16 Demba Ba (Newcastle)
14 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Blackburn)
13 Edin Dzeko (Manchester City)

FA CUP

Last 16
Replays
Mar 6: Birmingham 0 Chelsea 2.
Mar 7: Tottenham 3 Stevenage 1.

Quarter-finals
Mar 17: Everton 1 Sunderland 1.
Mar 18: Chelsea 5 Leicester 2; Liverpool 2 Stoke 1.
Still to play: Tottenham v Bolton.

Semi-finals draw
Liverpool v *Everton OR Sunderland* (Apr 14)
Tottenham OR Bolton v Chelsea (Apr 15)

FRANCE

Saturday, March 3
Bordeaux 1 (Planus 67)
Nice 2 (Monzon pen 18, Guie Guie 39) Att: 18,807

Dijon 1 (Kakuta 67)
Montpellier 1 (Tinhan 88) Att: 14,016

Lille 2 (Hazard 34, pen 63)
Auxerre 2 (Sahar 80, Hengbart 84) Att: 16,971

Marseille 0
Toulouse 1 (Abdennour 66) Att: 40,189

Nancy 2 (Puygrenier 66, Bakar 75)
Lyon 0 Att: 17,049

Saint-Etienne 0
Evian 2 (Mongongu 38, Sagbo 90+1) Att: 22,254

Sochaux 1 (Isimat-Mirin og 77)
Valenciennes 1 (Pujol 69) Att: 11,069

Sunday, March 4
Caen 0
Brest 0 Att: 15,027

Lorient 0
Rennes 2 (Pitroipa 41, Hadji 79) Att: 15,310

Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Pastore 27, Menez 29, Hoarau 86, Nene 90+2)
Ajaccio 1 (Poulard 42) Att: 44,510

Tuesday, March 6
Evian 2 (Leroy 15, 22)
Marseille 0 Att: 14,920

Friday, March 9
Ajaccio 1 (Andre 89)
Marseille 0 Att: 7,831

Saturday, March 10
Brest 0
Bordeaux 2 (Gouffran 35, Plasil 48) Att: 13,100

Evian 2 (Mongongu pen 25, Cambon 71)
Sochaux 3 (Butin 30, 66, Nogueira 44) Att: 10,861

Lyon 2 (Lacazette 12, Lopez 38)
Lille 1 (Chedjou 45+1) Att: 33,318

Nice 1 (Dja Djedje 37)
Nancy 1 (Niculae 12) Att: 8,405

Toulouse 1 (Mareque og 51)
Lorient 1 (Emeghara 61) Att: 10,140

STANDINGS ON MARCH 26

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid (Spa)	35	2	70
	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	35	2	70
3	Robin Van Persie	Arsenal (Eng)	26	2	52
4	Burak Yilmaz	Trabzonspor (Tur)	31	1.5	46.5
5	Aleksandrs Cekulajevs	Trans Narva (Est)	46	1	46
	Mario Gomez	Bayern Munich (Ger)	23	2	46
7	Klaas-Jan Huntelaar	Schalke (Ger)	22	2	44
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Milan (Ita)	22	2	44
9	Wayne Rooney	Manchester United (Eng)	21	2	42
10	Seydou Doumbia	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	26	1.5	39
11	Edinson Cavani	Napoli (Ita)	19	2	38
	Antonio Di Natale	Udinese (Ita)	19	2	38
	Radamel Falcao	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	19	2	38
14	Olivier Giroud	Montpellier (Fra)	18	2	36
	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	18	2	36
16	Bas Dost	Heerenveen (Hol)	23	1.5	34.5
17	Sergio Aguero	Manchester City (Eng)	17	2	34
	Robert Lewandowski	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)	17	2	34
19	Jeremy Perbet	Mons (Blg)	22	1.5	33
20	Demba Ba	Newcastle (Eng)	16	2	32
	Karim Benzema	Real Madrid (Spa)	16	2	32
	Claudio Pizarro	Werder Bremen (Ger)	16	2	32
	Lukas Podolski	Cologne (Ger)	16	2	32
	Roberto Soldado	Valencia (Spa)	16	2	32
25	Sanharib Malki	Roda JC (Hol)	21	1.5	31.5

Opener...Borussia Dortmund's Lukasz Piszczek (left)

GERMANY

Dortmund hit six

Borussia Dortmund came from behind to beat struggling Cologne 6-1 and keep themselves five points clear of closest challengers Bayern Munich. The result equalled Dortmund's previous best-ever away win, in August 1994 – also against Cologne.

HOLLAND

Heaviest home defeat

PSV Eindhoven slipped from the top of the Eredivisie after they lost 6-2 at home to Twente – their heaviest-ever league defeat at the Philips Stadion.

Heracles beat league leaders AZ with two extra-time goals to reach the Dutch Cup Final for the first time. The game ended 2-2 after 90 minutes, but goals from Thomas Bruns and Ninos Gouriye secured Heracles a date with PSV Eindhoven on April 8.

Ajax remain second in the league, a point behind AZ, after beating PSV Eindhoven 2-0 with goals from Ismail Aissati and Siem De Jong to record a seventh successive victory.

6 consecutive Bundesliga games in which Mohamed Zidan scored for Mainz following his January arrival from Borussia Dortmund

Valenciennes 1 (Aboubakar 69)
Saint-Etienne 2 (Aubameyang 74, Sako 77)
Att: 16,507

Sunday, March 11

Dijon 1 (Paulle 76)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Tiene 49, Gameiro 90+1)
Att: 14,446

Montpellier 3 (Ait-Fana 51, Camara 83, Giroud pen 90+1)
Caen 0 Att: 14,501

Rennes 1 (Brahimi 66)
Auxerre 1 (Oliech 10) Att: 22,886

Saturday, March 17

Auxerre 0
Evian 2 (Kahlenberg 8, Berigaud 90+4) Att: 17,991

Bordeaux 1 (Diabate 70)
Ajaccio 1 (Poulard 90+3) Att: 17,946

Caen 2 (Frau 54, Heurtaux 71)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Pastore 56, Jallet 90+1)
Att: 19,152

Lorient 2 (Ecuele Manga 52, Monnet-Paquet 87)
Brest 1 (Ben Basat 11) Att: 15,454

Marseille 1 (Remy pen 11)
Dijon 2 (Sankhare 24, Kakuta pen 79) Att: 40,445

Nancy 1 (Andre Luiz pen 63)
Montpellier 0 Att: 17,136

Saint-Etienne 0
Lyon 1 (Gomis 81) Att: 26,210

Sunday, March 18

Lille 4 (Hazard 18, Angoua og 57, Chedjou 69, De Melo 83)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 17,443

Rennes 0
Toulouse 1 (Danze og 44) Att: 22,127

Sochaux 2 (Butin 45+1, Martin 68)
Nice 0 Att: 15,930

Saturday, March 24

Ajaccio 1 (Ilan 60)
Lorient 1 (Bourillon 5) Att: 5,972

Brest 0
Nancy 1 (Traore 18) Att: 13,970

Evian 0
Lille 3 (Hazard pen 36, Payet 55, Pedretti 67)
Att: 12,248

Lyon 2 (Lovren 3, Gomis 65)
Sochaux 1 (Maiga 71) Att: 32,730

Montpellier 1 (Giroud 89)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 24,615

Nice 1 (Monzon pen 76)
Marseille 1 (A Ayew 56) Att: 11,727

Valenciennes 1 (Danic pen 13)
Rennes 0 Att: 12,135

Sunday, March 25

Dijon 2 (Kone 21, Sankhare 69)
Caen 0 Att: 13,477

Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Hoarau 81)
Bordeaux 1 (Diabate 77) Att: 44,723

Toulouse 1 (Tabanou 38)
Auxerre 0 Att: 30,538

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montpellier	29	18	6	5	53	27	60
PSG	29	17	9	3	53	30	60
Lille	29	14	11	4	53	31	53
Toulouse	29	14	8	7	31	24	50
Lyon	29	15	4	10	46	36	49
Saint-Etienne	29	13	7	9	35	31	46
Rennes	29	12	8	9	37	33	44
Bordeaux	29	10	11	8	35	32	41
Marseille	29	10	10	9	36	30	40
Evian	29	9	9	11	41	43	36
Valenciennes	29	9	7	13	29	34	34
Nancy	29	8	9	12	27	36	33
Dijon	29	9	6	14	36	48	33
Lorient	29	7	11	11	28	37	32
Ajaccio	29	7	10	12	31	49	31
Brest	29	5	15	9	23	27	30
Caen	29	7	8	14	32	44	29
Nice	29	6	10	13	27	34	28
Sochaux	29	6	9	14	29	45	27
Auxerre	29	4	12	13	33	44	24

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

18 Olivier Giroud (Montpellier)
13 Eden Hazard (Lille)
13 Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)
12 Bafetimbi Gomis (Lyon)
11 Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Saint-Etienne)
11 Kevin Gameiro (Paris Saint-Germain)

FRENCH CUP

Quarter-finals

Mar 20: Quevilly 3 Marseille 2 (aet).
Mar 21: GFCO Ajaccio 1 Montpellier 0; Paris Saint-Germain 1 Lyon 3; Valenciennes 1 Rennes 3.

Semi-finals draw

GFCO Ajaccio v Lyon
Quevilly v Rennes (both Apr 10)

GERMANY

Saturday, March 3

Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Kiessling 79, Bellarabi 90)
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 30,210

Borussia Dortmund 2 (Blaszczykowski 26, Kagawa 77)
Mainz 1 (Zidan 74) Att: 80,720

Freiburg 2 (Freis 18, Caligiuri pen 66)
Schalke 1 (Pukki 72) Att: 24,000

Hamburg 0
Stuttgart 4 (Ibisevic 23, Kuzmanovic pen 31, pen 47, Harnik 90) Att: 55,263

Hanover 2 (Haggui 33, Diouf 69)
Augsburg 2 (Bellinghausen 12, Callsen-Bracker pen 89) Att: 42,300

Hertha 1 (Rukavytsya 62)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 52,744

Kaiserslautern 0
Wolfsburg 0 Att: 34,110

Sunday, March 4

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Compper 33)
Cologne 1 (Podolski 81) Att: 29,250

Nuremberg 1 (Bunjaku 87)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 45,675

Friday, March 9

Stuttgart 0
Kaiserslautern 0 Att: 50,100

Saturday, March 10

Augsburg 0
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 30,660

Bayern Munich 7 (Gomez 5, 35, 48, Robben pen 12, 29, Kroos 18, Ribery 58)
1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Luiz Gustavo og 85)
Att: 69,000

Cologne 1 (Clemens 36)
Hertha 0 Att: 48,000

Mainz 2 (N Muller 1, Zidan 22)
Nuremberg 1 (Didavi 64) Att: 34,000

Monchengladbach 0
Freiburg 0 Att: 52,207

Wolfsburg 3 (Helmes 32, Dejagah 45, Kadlec og 61)
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Kiessling 3, Derdiyok 90+1)
Att: 26,112

Sunday, March 11

Schalke 3 (Pukki 5, Metzelder 26, Huntelaar pen 33)
Hamburg 1 (Kacar 45) Att: 61,673

Werder Bremen 3 (Pizarro 31, Prodl 49, Rosenberg 56)
Hanover 0 Att: 41,500

Friday, March 16

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Salihovic pen 74)
Stuttgart 2 (Ibisevic 8, 43) Att: 30,150

Saturday, March 17

Augsburg 2 (Koo 43, Langkamp 51)
Mainz 1 (Allagui 36) Att: 30,025

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Kiessling 75)
Monchengladbach 2 (Reus 7, De Camargo 88)
Att: 30,210

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Kagawa 8)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 80,720

Hamburg 1 (Ilicevic 75)
Freiburg 3 (Flum 20, Caligiuri 43, Makiadi 72)
Att: 52,414

Hertha 0
Bayern Munich 6 (Muller 9, Robben 12, pen 19, pen 67, Gomez pen 50, Kroos 51) Att: 74,244

Nuremberg 1 (Didavi 9)
Wolfsburg 3 (Mandzukic 15, Helmes 24, 53)
Att: 39,320

Sunday, March 18

Hanover 4 (Stindl 19, Schlaudraff pen 61, Diouf 67, 83)
Cologne 1 (Pezzoni 43) Att: 45,000

Kaiserslautern 1 (Rodnei 3)
Schalke 4 (Holtby 39, Huntelaar 45, Raul 51, Farfan 81) Att: 49,780

Friday, March 23

Wolfsburg 2 (Mandzukic 46, Schafer 75)
Hamburg 1 (Berg 47) Att: 30,000

Saturday, March 24

Bayern Munich 2 (Kroos 36, Gomez 68)
Hanover 1 (Ya Konan 74) Att: 69,000

Freiburg 2 (Guede 8, Makiadi 14)
Kaiserslautern 0 Att: 24,000

Mainz 1 (Choupo-Moting 58)
Hertha 3 (Ben-Hatira 41, Ramos 52, 69)
Att: 33,152

Monchengladbach 1 (Reus 38)
1899 Hoffenheim 2 (Roberto Firmino 77, Vukcevic 79) Att: 52,796

Schalke 2 (Huntelaar 18, 86)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 61,673

Werder Bremen 1 (Fullkrug 61)
Augsburg 1 (Verhaegh 90+2) Att: 40,208

Sunday, March 25

Cologne 1 (Novakovic 13)
Borussia Dortmund 6 (Piszczek 26, Kagawa 47, 80, Lewandowski 52, Gundogan 79, Perisic 84)
Att: 50,000

Stuttgart 1 (Cacau 78)
Nuremberg 0 Att: 55,800

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dortmund	27	19	5	3	59	17	62
Bayern	27	18	3	6	66	18	57
Schalke	27	17	2	8	60	34	53
M'gladbach	27	15	6	6	40	18	51
Leverkusen	27	11	7	9	39	36	40
Werder	27	11	7	9	41	40	40
Stuttgart	27	11	6	10	44	34	39
Hanover	27	9	11	7	35	38	38
Wolfsburg	27	11	4	12	36	48	37
Hoffenheim	27	8	9	10	31	38	33
Nuremberg	27	9	4	14	25	38	31
Mainz	27	7	9	11	39	44	30
Freiburg	27	7	7	13	35	53	28
Cologne	27	8	4	15	34	56	28
Augsburg	27	5	12	10	28	41	27
Hamburg	27	6	9	12	31	50	27
Hertha	27	6	8	13	29	48	26
Kaiserslautern	27	3	11	13	17	38	20

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading scorers

23 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
22 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)
17 Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)
16 Claudio Pizarro (Werder Bremen)
16 Lukas Podolski (Cologne)
15 Marco Reus (Monchengladbach)

GERMAN CUP

Semi-finals

Mar 20: Greuther Furth 0 Borussia Dortmund 1 (aet).
Mar 21: Monchengladbach 0 Bayern Munich 0 (aet, Bayern 4-2 on pens).

Final

Borussia Dortmund v Bayern Munich (May 12)

Final...Heracles celebrate

14 years since Lazio last completed a Serie A home-and-away double over rivals Roma

ISRAEL

Players banned

Hapoel Tel Aviv's Avihai Yadin and Salim Toama were banned by the Israeli FA for 12 months and six months respectively for "unsportsmanlike behaviour" after the two players continuously argued with the referee as their side lost 1-0 to their fierce rivals Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Hapoel Tel Aviv were also punished, being deducted three points because of fan violence during the same game.

ITALY

Juve equal record

Juventus equalled a club-record run of 30 games unbeaten with their 2-0 win over Internazionale. Alessandro Del Piero's goal means he has now scored in 20 Serie A campaigns.

Still going strong...Del Piero

GREECE

Mar 3: Panionios 1 Atromitos 2; Aris 1 AEK 0; Xanthi 0 Panetolikos 1.
Mar 4: Levadiakos 4 Kerkyra 3; Asteras 3 Ergotelis 0; OFI 0 Olympiakos 2; Doxa 1 Giannina 0; Panathinaikos 0 PAOK 2.
Mar 7: Kerkyra 3 Levadiakos 2; Giannina 1 Doxa 0.
Mar 10: Atromitos 2 Doxa 0; OFI 0 Panionios 1; PAOK 2 Asteras 3.
Mar 11: Giannina 2 Levadiakos 0; Kerkyra 2 Xanthi 0; Olympiakos 3 Aris 0; Panetolikos 2 Ergotelis 0; AEK 2 Panathinaikos 0.
Mar 14: Levadiakos 1 Giannina 1; Doxa 0 Atromitos 1.
Mar 17: Aris 1 OFI 0; Ergotelis 1 Kerkyra 0; Asteras 1 AEK 1.
Mar 18: Xanthi 1 Giannina 2; Levadiakos 2 Atromitos 2; Panionios 2 Doxa 0; Panetolikos 1 PAOK 1; Panathinaikos 0 Olympiakos 3 (awarded).
Mar 24: Aris 4 Panionios 2; Atromitos 1 Xanthi 0; OFI 0 Panathinaikos 1.
Mar 25: Doxa 0 Levadiakos 2; Kerkyra 0 PAOK 4; AEK 1 Panetolikos 0; Giannina 1 Ergotelis 1; Olympiakos 7 Asteras 2.

GREECE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	26	20	4	2	63	16	64
Panathinaikos*	26	18	3	5	44	23	54
Atromitos	26	13	8	5	30	22	47
PAOK	26	13	7	6	39	21	46
AEK	26	13	6	7	32	25	45
Aris	26	10	9	7	27	23	39
Asteras	26	11	5	10	23	30	38
OFI	26	9	6	11	23	24	33
Levadiakos	26	8	6	12	26	37	30
Xanthi	26	8	5	13	25	30	29
Giannina	26	7	8	11	24	29	29
Panionios	26	8	5	13	23	28	29
Ergotelis	26	7	6	13	22	36	27
Panetolikos	26	6	7	13	18	30	25
Kerkyra	26	6	6	14	23	40	24
Doxa	26	4	3	19	9	37	15

30-round season (15x2); teams placed 2nd to 5th will enter play-offs to determine Greece's 2nd Champions League representatives, bottom 3 will be relegated
**3pts deducted for fan violence during home game against Olympiakos*

HOLLAND

Mar 3: Den Haag 0 Heerenveen 0; RKC 1 Excelsior 0; VVV 2 NAC 1; AZ 3 Heracles 1.
Mar 4: Vitesse 2 De Graafschap 0; Feyenoord 1 Groningen 0; Utrecht 0 NEC 0; Ajax 4 Roda JC 1; PSV 2 Twente 6.
Mar 9: Roda JC 3 VVV 1.
Mar 10: Groningen 1 Vitesse 3; Heracles 0 Den Haag 2; Heerenveen 4 Excelsior 2.
Mar 11: NAC 3 PSV 1; NEC 3 Twente 1; Feyenoord 1 Utrecht 1; Ajax 3 RKC 0; De Graafschap 0 AZ 2.
Mar 16: Vitesse 2 Heracles 0.
Mar 17: RKC 1 De Graafschap 0; Excelsior 2 Roda JC 1; VVV 0 NEC 2.
Mar 18: Den Haag 0 Ajax 2; PSV 5 Heerenveen 1; Twente 0 Feyenoord 2; Utrecht 3 Groningen 1; AZ 0 NAC 0.
Mar 21: De Graafschap 1 Twente 2.
Mar 23: Excelsior 0 Groningen 1.
Mar 24: Roda JC 3 Vitesse 1; NAC 1 NEC 1; Heerenveen 4 VVV 1; Den Haag 1 Twente 1.
Mar 25: AZ 1 RKC 0; Heracles 3 Utrecht 1; De Graafschap 0 Feyenoord 3; Ajax 2 PSV 0.

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	27	17	5	5	54	25	56
Ajax	27	16	7	4	70	33	55
Twente	27	15	7	5	69	32	52
PSV	27	15	6	6	68	40	51
Feyenoord	27	15	6	6	54	32	51
Heerenveen	27	14	9	4	61	42	51
Vitesse	27	12	5	10	35	32	41
Roda JC	27	12	1	14	47	57	37
Groningen	27	10	5	12	38	49	35
NEC	27	10	4	13	31	36	34
RKC	27	10	4	13	28	39	34
Heracles	27	9	6	12	42	42	33
Utrecht	27	7	9	11	40	45	30
NAC	27	8	6	13	34	40	30
Den Haag	27	7	8	12	30	51	29
VVV	27	7	4	16	32	62	25
Excelsior	27	4	6	17	21	59	18
De Graafschap	27	4	4	19	22	60	16

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

HUNGARY

HUNGARY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Debrecen	21	15	6	0	42	15	51
Gyor	21	15	2	4	41	22	47
Videoton	21	13	2	6	39	15	41
Honved	21	10	6	5	37	26	36
Diosgyor	21	10	4	7	31	27	34
Pecs	21	8	8	5	30	32	32
Kecskemet	21	9	4	8	35	29	31
Paks	21	7	6	8	34	39	27
Szombathely	21	6	7	8	24	27	25
Ferencvaros	21	6	5	10	20	21	23
Siofok	21	5	8	8	22	31	23
Ujpest	21	6	3	12	26	36	21
Kaposvar	21	3	11	7	25	33	20
Vasas	21	4	8	9	21	33	20
Papa	21	5	4	12	21	32	19
Zalaegerszeg	21	0	8	13	19	49	8

Standings on Mar 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

ISRAEL

Regular season

Mar 3: Bnei Yehuda 2 Maccabi Petah Tikva 2; Hapoel Haifa 2 Ramat HaSharon 0; Netanya 3 Bnei Sakhnin 1; Hapoel Petah Tikva 0 Rishon LeZion 1; Be'er Sheva 2 Ashdod 1; Beitar 1 Kiryat Shmona 0.
Mar 4: Acre 0 Maccabi Haifa 1.
Mar 5: Hapoel Tel Aviv 0 Maccabi Tel Aviv 1.
Mar 10: Kiryat Shmona 2 Acre 0; Rishon LeZion 2 Ashdod 1; Bnei Sakhnin 3 Hapoel Petah Tikva 0; Bnei Yehuda 5 Be'er Sheva 1; Ramat HaSharon 0 Netanya 1; Maccabi Petah Tikva 2 Beitar 3.
Mar 11: Maccabi Tel Aviv 2 Hapoel Haifa 0.
Mar 12: Maccabi Haifa 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 4.
Mar 17: Be'er Sheva 2 Rishon LeZion 1; Netanya 3 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0; Ashdod 3 Bnei Sakhnin 3; Hapoel Petah Tikva 1 Ramat HaSharon 1; Acre 0 Maccabi Petah Tikva 0; Hapoel Haifa 1 Maccabi Haifa 1.
Mar 18: Hapoel Tel Aviv 2 Kiryat Shmona 2.
Mar 19: Beitar 2 Bnei Yehuda 1.

ISRAEL – REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiryat Shmona	30	19	9	2	42	15	66
H Tel Aviv*	30	14	10	6	53	27	49
Bnei Sakhnin**	30	14	7	9	49	35	47
Ashdod	30	12	11	7	39	33	47
Netanya	30	13	8	9	44	40	47
M Haifa	30	12	9	9	46	39	45
M Tel Aviv	30	13	5	12	41	32	44
Bnei Yehuda	30	11	10	9	38	27	43
Acre	30	10	8	12	41	37	38
R HaSharon	30	9	10	11	29	38	37
Beitar†	30	10	6	14	22	39	34
H Haifa	30	8	8	14	33	38	32
Be'er Sheva	30	9	5	16	33	54	32
M Petah Tikva	30	7	9	14	31	50	30
Rishon LeZion	30	6	9	15	34	54	27
H Petah Tikva††	30	6	10	14	28	45	19

Top 8 formed championship group, bottom 8 formed relegation group
**3pts deducted because of fan violence during match against Maccabi Tel Aviv*
***2pts deducted for contract irregularities*
†2pts deducted for fans' racial abuse of opposition player
††9pts deducted for going into administration

● *Teams carried forward full points and goals record from regular season*

Championship group

Mar 24: Bnei Sakhnin 0 Maccabi Haifa 2; Ashdod 0 Netanya 2; Hapoel Tel Aviv 0 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0.
Mar 26: Kiryat Shmona 0 Bnei Yehuda 1.

ISRAEL – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiryat Shmona	31	19	9	3	42	16	66
H Tel Aviv*	31	14	11	6	53	27	50
Netanya	31	14	8	9	46	40	50
M Haifa	31	13	9	9	48	39	48
Bnei Sakhnin**	31	14	7	10	49	37	47
Ashdod	31	12	11	8	39	35	47
Bnei Yehuda	31	12	10	9	39	27	46
M Tel Aviv	31	13	6	12	41	32	45

7-round stage (7x1)

Relegation group

Mar 24: Hapoel Haifa 2 Be'er Sheva 1; Acre 2 Hapoel Petah Tikva 3; Ramat HaSharon 5 Rishon LeZion 2.
Mar 25: Beitar 3 Maccabi Petah Tikva 1.

ISRAEL – RELEGATION GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
R HaSharon	31	10	10	11	34	40	40
Acre	31	10	8	13	43	40	38
Beitar†	31	11	6	14	25	40	37
H Haifa	31	9	8	14	35	39	35
Be'er Sheva	31	9	5	17	34	56	32
M Petah Tikva	31	7	9	15	32	53	30
Rishon LeZion	31	6	9	16	36	59	27
H Petah Tikva††	31	7	10	14	31	47	22

7-round stage (7x1); bottom 3 will go down

ITALY

Saturday, March 3

Juventus 1 (Ceglie 18)
Chievo 1 (Drame 76) Att: 38,361

Palermo 0
Milan 4 (Ibrahimovic 21, 31, 35, Thiago Silva 58) Att: 22,246

Sunday, March 4

Bologna 1 (Acquafresca 82)
Novara 0 Att: 17,516

Fiorentina 2 (Moras og 61, Nastasic 74)
Cesena 0 Att: 26,834

Internazionale 2 (Forlan 71, Milito 80)
Catania 2 (Gomez 20, Izco 38) Att: 28,927

Lecce 2 (Muriel 61, Brivio 81)
Genoa 2 (Sculli 21, 85) Att: 8,106

Parma 1 (Zaccardo 77)
Napoli 2 (Cavani 40, Lavezzi 86) Att: 16,416

Roma 1 (Borini 16)
Lazio 2 (Hernanes pen 10, Mauri 61) Att: 50,801

Siena 3 (Bogdani 40, Calaio 80, Grosso 82)
Cagliari 0 Att: 8,529

Udinese 0
Atalanta 0 Att: 18,651

Wednesday, March 7

Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 17)
Juventus 1 (Vucinic 58) Att: 30,321

Cesena 0
Catania 0 Att: 14,490

Parma 2 (Okaka 27, Giovinco pen 87)
Fiorentina 2 (Nastasic 60, Cerci 71) Att: 12,916

Friday, March 9

Chievo 0
Internazionale 2 (Samuel 87, Milito 90)
Att: 20,000

Napoli 6 (Hamsik 10, Cannavaro 19, Astori og 30, Lavezzi pen 56, Gargano 70, Maggio 84)
Cagliari 3 (Larrivey 37, 77, 90+2) Att: 55,682

Saturday, March 10

Palermo 0
Roma 1 (Borini 3) Att: 16,451

Sunday, March 11

Atalanta 1 (Manfredini 5)
Parma 1 (Paletta 55) Att: 14,210

Catania 1 (Lodi pen 58)
Fiorentina 0 Att: 12,580

Cesena 0
Siena 2 (Brienza 75, Bogdani 81) Att: 15,360

Genoa 0
Juventus 0 Att: 27,527

Lazio 1 (Rubin og 56)
Bologna 3 (Portanova 11, Diamanti 28, Krhin 60)
Att: 30,000

Milan 2 (Nocerino 7, Ibrahimovic 65)
Lecce 0 Att: 54,329

Crowded out...Porto's Marc Janko is outnumbered against Benfica

KAZAKHSTAN

Cup holders triumph

Cup holders Ordabasy beat league champions Shakhter Karagandy 1-0, with a goal from Kairat Ashirbekov, in the Kazakhstan Super Cup.

PORTUGAL

League to expand

The country's Professional Football League has approved the expansion of the top flight from 16 to 18 clubs from the beginning of next season.

The increase in numbers will be achieved by allowing the bottom two teams this term to avoid relegation. The decision still needs to be ratified by the Portuguese Football Federation and Portugal's National Sports Council.

Some of the clubs which voted against the proposal said they would challenge the measure.

Benfica's Estadio da Luz in Lisbon has been chosen to host the 2014 Champions League Final. It is the first time that the competition's showpiece has returned to the Portuguese capital since the Final of the old-style European Cup in 1967, when Celtic beat

Novara 1 (Jeda 16)
Udinese 0 Att: 8,708

Saturday, March 17

Fiorentina 0
Juventus 5 (Vucinic 15, Vidal 28, Marchisio 54, Pirlo 67, Padoin 72) Att: 36,387

Parma 0
Milan 2 (Ibrahimovic pen 17, Emanuelson 55) Att: 19,481

Sunday, March 18

Bologna 2 (Di Vaio 59, Diamanti 81)
Chievo 2 (Andreolli 27, Thereau 69) Att: 17,446

Cagliari 3 (Pinilla 14, pen 45+1, pen 56)
Cesena 0 Att: 9,500

Catania 1 (Legrottaglie 80)
Lazio 0 Att: 17,406

Internazionale 0
Atalanta 0 Att: 38,610

Lecce 1 (Di Michele pen 6)
Palermo 1 (Munoz 15) Att: 8,477

Siena 0
Novara 2 (Rigoni 72, Porcari 81) Att: 9,891

Udinese 2 (Pinzi 28, Di Natale 52)
Napoli 2 (Cavani 81, 85) Att: 21,661

Monday, March 19

Roma 1 (Osvaldo 3)
Genoa 0 Att: 31,460

Saturday, March 24

Milan 2 (Ibrahimovic pen 53, 83)
Roma 1 (Osvaldo 44) Att: 59,133

Palermo 1 (Miccoli 31)
Udinese 1 (Torje 85) Att: 17,918

Sunday, March 25

Atalanta 2 (Gabbiadini 50, Tiribocchi 90+1)
Bologna 0 Att: 13,600

Cesena 2 (Santana 46, Nero 53)
Parma 2 (Floccari 40, Paletta 61) Att: 14,919

Chievo 1 (Acerbi 9)
Siena 1 (Destro 51) Att: 6,000

Genoa 2 (Belluschi 21, Palacio 89)
Fiorentina 2 (Montolivo 31, Natali 69) Att: 20,200

Juventus 2 (Caceres 58, Del Piero 71)
Internazionale 0 Att: 38,536

Lazio 1 (Diakite 88)
Cagliari 0 Att: 29,290

Napoli 2 (Dzemaili 61, Cavani 67)
Catania 2 (Spolli 74, Lanzafame 85) Att: 51,055

Novara 0
Lecce 0 Att: 9,943

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milan	29	19	6	4	59	23	63
Juventus	29	15	14	0	46	17	59
Lazio	29	15	6	8	43	34	51
Napoli	29	12	12	5	54	32	48
Udinese	29	13	9	7	40	27	48
Roma	29	13	5	11	42	35	44
Catania	29	10	12	7	38	37	42
Inter	29	12	5	12	38	38	41
Atalanta*	29	10	13	6	33	29	37
Bologna	29	9	9	11	31	35	36
Palermo	29	10	6	13	41	46	36
Chievo	29	9	9	11	25	36	36
Cagliari	29	8	10	11	29	36	34
Genoa	29	9	7	13	37	51	34
Siena	29	8	9	12	33	31	33
Fiorentina	29	8	9	12	29	35	33
Parma	29	7	11	11	35	46	32
Lecce	29	6	9	14	31	45	27
Novara	29	5	9	15	24	46	24
Cesena	29	4	6	19	18	47	18

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
**6pts deducted because of involvement in match-fixing scandal*

Leading scorers

22 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)
19 Edinson Cavani (Napoli)
19 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
15 German Denis (Atalanta)
15 Rodrigo Palacio (Genoa)
14 Diego Milito (Internazionale)

ITALIAN CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Feb 8/9; 2nd legs - Mar 20/21
Milan v Juventus 1-2, 2-2 (aet) (agg 3-4)
Siena v Napoli 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)

Final

Juventus v Napoli (May 20)

MACEDONIA

MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vardar	21	16	5	0	34	7	53
Metalurg	21	12	7	2	31	9	43
Shkendija	21	12	4	5	34	19	40
Sileks	21	9	3	9	28	31	30
Renova	21	6	10	5	29	24	28
Rabotnicki	21	7	5	9	31	27	26
Bregalnica	21	7	5	9	28	29	26
Ohrid	21	6	6	9	19	28	24
Teteks	21	5	7	9	14	30	22
Napredok	21	6	4	11	17	34	22
Turnovo	21	5	5	11	17	26	20
11 Oktomvri	21	2	5	14	16	34	11

Standings on Mar 27
33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

MALTA

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward half their points and full goals record

MALTA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Valletta	25	19	5	1	62	20	35
Hibernians	25	17	6	2	59	18	32
Birkirkara	25	13	3	9	39	31	25
Floriana	25	13	6	6	38	25	24
Sliema	25	8	12	5	38	31	19
Balzan	25	9	5	11	34	47	17

Standings on Mar 27
10-round stage (5x2)

MONTENEGRO

MONTENEGRO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buducnost	21	16	3	2	52	17	51
Rudar	21	15	5	1	36	13	50
Mogren	21	9	9	3	32	20	36
Zeta	21	10	6	5	29	21	36
Petrovac	21	9	6	6	26	24	33
Mladost	21	7	6	8	20	25	27
Grbalj	21	7	4	10	20	26	25
Decic	21	7	2	12	23	33	23
Berane	21	6	4	11	22	31	22
Sutjeska	21	3	7	11	12	23	16
Lovcen	21	2	8	11	13	33	14
Bokelj	21	3	4	14	14	33	13

Standings on Mar 27
33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

NORTHERN IRELAND

NORTHERN IRELAND – REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Linfield	33	25	2	6	74	24	77
Portadown	33	20	5	8	66	38	65
Cliftonville	33	20	5	8	76	55	65
Coleraine	33	16	10	7	54	34	58
Crusaders	33	16	8	9	55	43	56
Glentoran	33	14	8	11	63	44	50
D'gal Celtic	33	12	5	16	40	63	41
Ballymena	33	10	7	16	51	65	37
Lisburn Dis'ry	33	7	7	19	45	73	28
Glenavon	33	7	6	20	45	60	27
Dungannon	33	6	9	18	33	62	27
Carrick	33	5	8	20	39	80	23

Top 6 form championship group, bottom 6 form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down and the 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off)

NORWAY

Mar 23: Molde 2 Stromsgodset 1.
Mar 24: Honefoss 0 Lillestrom 0.
Mar 25: Tromso 1 Fredrikstad 0; Valerenga 2 Haugesund 1; Stabaek 0 Aalesund 0; Odd Grenland 0 Sogndal 4; Rosenborg 3 Brann 1.
Mar 26: Sandnes Ulf 2 Viking 2.

NORWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sogndal	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Rosenborg	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Molde	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Valerenga	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Tromso	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Sandnes Ulf	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Viking	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Aalesund	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Honefoss	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Lillestrom	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Stabaek	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Haugesund	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Stromsgodset	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Fredrikstad	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Brann	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Odd Grenland	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

POLAND

Mar 2: Korona 2 Podbeskidzie 0; Cracovia 0 Zaglebie 2.
Mar 3: GKS 2 Polonia 1; Legia 2 LKS 0; Lechia 0 Wisla 2.
Mar 4: Widzew 2 Slask 2; Jagiellonia 0 Ruch 1.
Mar 9: LKS 2 Cracovia 2; Wisla 0 Lech 0.
Mar 10: Gornik 2 Lechia 2; Podbeskidzie 0 Legia 1; Zaglebie 1 Ruch 1.
Mar 11: Widzew 1 GKS 0; Slask 1 Korona 2.
Mar 12: Polonia 4 Jagiellonia 1.
Mar 16: Zaglebie 1 Widzew 0; Legia 0 Polonia 0.
Mar 17: Gornik 0 LKS 0; GKS 2 Wisla 2; Jagiellonia 2 Lech 0.
Mar 18: Slask 3 Cracovia 0; Ruch 2 Podbeskidzie 2.
Mar 19: Lechia 0 Korona 0.
Mar 23: Jagiellonia 4 Widzew 1; Cracovia 1 Gornik 3.
Mar 24: LKS 1 Zaglebie 2; Lechia 2 Podbeskidzie 3; Legia 1 GKS 1.
Mar 25: Lech 2 Slask 0; Ruch 1 Wisla 0.
Mar 26: Korona 3 Polonia 0.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia	23	13	5	5	37	13	44
Slask	23	13	3	7	38	24	42
Ruch	23	12	5	6	35	22	41
Korona	23	11	8	4	28	20	41
Polonia	23	11	5	7	27	23	38
Wisla	23	9	6	8	22	19	33
Podbeskidzie	23	9	6	8	22	26	33
Lech	22	9	5	8	31	18	32
Widzew	23	8	8	7	20	21	32
Gornik	22	7	8	7	26	25	29
Jagiellonia	23	8	5	10	27	35	29
GKS	23	6	7	10	27	26	25
Zaglebie	23	6	6	11	23	37	24
Lechia	23	4	9	10	13	23	21
LKS	23	4	6	13	15	42	18
Cracovia	23	3	8	12	13	30	17

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

PORTUGAL

Mar 2: Benfica 2 Porto 3.
Mar 3: Nacional 1 Braga 3; Setubal 1 Sporting 0.
Mar 4: Gil Vicente 1 Pacos Ferreira 2; Feirense 1 Academica 1; Rio Ave 4 Beira Mar 0; Guimaraes 1 Maritimo 0.
Mar 5: Uniao Leiria 1 Olhanense 3.
Mar 9: Maritimo 2 Feirense 1.
Mar 10: Braga 2 Uniao Leiria 1; Porto 1 Academica 1.
Mar 11: Olhanense 4 Nacional 4; Rio Ave 3 Setubal 0; Beira Mar 1 Gil Vicente 0; Pacos Ferreira 1 Benfica 2; Sporting 5 Guimaraes 0.
Mar 16: Nacional 0 Porto 2; Benfica 3 Beira Mar 1.
Mar 17: Uniao Leiria 1 Rio Ave 0; Feirense 1 Braga 4.
Mar 18: Academica 0 Pacos Ferreira 1; Setubal 1 Maritimo 1; Guimaraes 2 Olhanense 2.
Mar 19: Gil Vicente 2 Sporting 0.
Mar 23: Olhanense 0 Benfica 0.
Mar 24: Sporting 1 Feirense 0.
Mar 25: Beira Mar 0 Nacional 3; Setubal 1 Uniao Leiria 0; Rio Ave 0 Guimaraes 1; Pacos Ferreira 1 Porto 1.
Mar 26: Maritimo 3 Gil Vicente 2; Braga 2 Academica 1.

Internazionale 2-1.

Turin will host that season's Europa League Final. The game will be played at the new Juventus Stadium, which opened at the start of this season.

Benfica came from 2-1 down to beat Porto 3-2 and reach a fourth successive League Cup Final, where they will face Gil Vicente, who beat Braga on penalties.

Victorious...Kilmarnock lift the Scottish League Cup for the first time

SCOTLAND

Final overshadowed

Kilmarnock won the Scottish League Cup for the first time, beating Celtic 1-0 in the Final with a goal from substitute Dieter Van Tornhout on his 27th birthday.

The triumph was overshadowed by the death of Kilmarnock midfielder Liam Kelly's father from a suspected heart attack just after the final whistle.

Rangers managed to avoid their worst nightmare – bitter Glasgow rivals Celtic winning the league title at Ibrox Stadium – by winning the 398th Old Firm derby 3-2. However, Celtic's 43rd title triumph, and their first since 2008, remains a virtual certainty. With seven games to play, they were 18 points clear.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Braga	24	18	4	2	53	20	58
Porto	24	17	6	1	54	17	57
Benfica	24	17	5	2	54	21	56
Maritimo	24	13	6	5	36	27	45
Sporting	24	13	5	6	37	19	44
Guimaraes	24	11	3	10	29	30	36
Olhanense	24	6	11	7	30	32	29
Nacional	24	8	5	11	31	41	29
Gil Vicente	24	6	8	10	24	36	26
P Ferreira	24	7	4	13	28	43	25
Rio Ave	24	7	3	14	24	29	24
Setubal	24	6	6	12	21	41	24
Academica	24	5	8	11	22	31	23
Beira Mar	24	5	5	14	18	30	20
Uniao Leiria	24	5	3	16	21	44	18
Feirense	24	3	8	13	17	38	17

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Mar 2: Drogheda 1 Shamrock 2; Derry 1 Bohemians 0; UCD 1 Cork 0; St Patrick's 1 Bray 0; Monaghan 0 Dundalk 0; Shelbourne 1 Sligo 1.
Mar 9: Cork 2 Drogheda 3; Dundalk 0 St Patrick's 2; Bray 0 Derry 4; Bohemians 0 Shelbourne 2; Shamrock 3 Monaghan 1.
Mar 10: Sligo 2 UCD 1.
Mar 16: Cork 1 Shamrock 1; Drogheda 0 Dundalk 0; St Patrick's 1 Monaghan 1; UCD 2 Bray 3; Sligo 1 Bohemians 0; Shelbourne 1 Derry 0.
Mar 23: Bray 2 Drogheda 4; Derry 2 Cork 0; Dundalk 2 UCD 1; Monaghan 0 Sligo 1; Shamrock 4 Shelbourne 0.
Mar 25: Bohemians 0 St Patrick's 0.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shamrock	4	3	1	0	10	3	10
Sligo	4	3	1	0	5	2	10
Derry	4	3	0	1	7	1	9
St Patrick's	4	2	2	0	4	1	8
Drogheda	4	2	1	1	8	6	7
Shelbourne	4	2	1	1	4	5	7
Dundalk	4	1	2	1	2	3	5
UCD	4	1	0	3	5	7	3
Bray	4	1	0	3	5	11	3
Monaghan	4	0	2	2	2	5	2
Cork	4	0	1	3	3	7	1
Bohemians	4	0	1	3	0	4	1

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

ROMANIA

Mar 2: Brasov 2 Pandurii 1; CFR 1 Tirgu-Mures 0.
Mar 3: Vointa 1 Astra 0; Rapid 1 Universitatea 1; Dinamo 2 Gaz Metan 0.
Mar 4: Petrolul 1 Vaslui 2; Mioveni 0 Steaua 1.
Mar 5: Ceahlaul 1 Sportul 2; Concordia 1 Otelul 0.
Mar 9: Vaslui 4 Concordia 0; Gaz Metan 1 CFR 1.
Mar 10: Otelul 0 Ceahlaul 0; Pandurii 2 Dinamo 2.
Mar 11: Sportul 2 Brasov 1; Tirgu-Mures 0 Vointa 0; Rapid 2 Petrolul 0.
Mar 12: Universitatea 0 Steaua 1; Astra 3 Mioveni 1.
Mar 16: Concordia 1 Rapid 0; Mioveni 0 Tirgu-Mures 0.
Mar 17: Vointa 0 Gaz Metan 2; CFR 2 Pandurii 0; Petrolul 2 Universitatea 2; Dinamo 1 Sportul 3.
Mar 18: Brasov 0 Otelul 2; Steaua 2 Astra 1.
Mar 19: Ceahlaul 1 Vaslui 3.
Mar 20: Gaz Metan 1 Mioveni 1; Pandurii 0 Vointa 0.
Mar 21: Sportul 1 CFR 1; Petrolul 3 Concordia 4; Universitatea 3 Astra 1; Otelul 1 Dinamo 1.
Mar 22: Rapid 1 Ceahlaul 2; Vaslui 0 Brasov 1; Tirgu-Mures 1 Steaua 0.
Mar 23: Mioveni 0 Pandurii 2.
Mar 24: Concordia 0 Universitatea 0.
Mar 25: Vointa 1 Sportul 0; Astra 0 Tirgu-Mures 2; Brasov 1 Rapid 0; Dinamo 0 Vaslui 1.
Mar 26: Ceahlaul 2 Petrolul 1; CFR 2 Otelul 0; Steaua 0 Gaz Metan 0.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR	23	15	5	3	44	16	50
Dinamo	23	13	6	4	38	17	45
Vaslui	23	13	3	7	38	20	42
Steaua	23	12	6	5	28	16	42
Rapid	23	12	5	6	34	22	41
Otelul	23	10	6	7	20	18	36
Pandurii	23	9	8	6	34	24	35
Universitatea	23	8	10	5	30	23	34
Brasov	23	8	5	10	23	22	29
Ceahlaul	23	7	8	8	22	30	29
Astra	23	7	7	9	22	26	28
Gaz Metan	23	7	6	10	30	35	27
Vointa	23	6	7	10	14	24	25
Tirgu-Mures	23	5	9	9	20	26	24
Sportul	23	5	9	9	25	36	24
Concordia	23	5	6	12	18	39	21
Petrolul	23	4	7	12	22	33	19
Mioveni	23	2	5	16	14	49	11

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

RUSSIA

Division split after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full points and goals record

Championship group

Mar 3: CSKA 2 Zenit 2; Lokomotiv 2 Kuban 0.
Mar 5: Dynamo 0 Anzhi 1; Rubin 1 Spartak Moscow 1.
Mar 9: CSKA 1 Dynamo 1.
Mar 11: Rubin 0 Lokomotiv 0; Zenit 1 Kuban 1.
Mar 12: Anzhi 0 Spartak Moscow 0.
Mar 16: Dynamo 1 Zenit 5.
Mar 18: Kuban 1 Rubin 0; Lokomotiv 1 Anzhi 0.
Mar 19: Spartak Moscow 1 CSKA 2.
Mar 24: CSKA 0 Lokomotiv 2.
Mar 25: Dynamo 1 Spartak Moscow 3; Zenit 1 Rubin 1; Anzhi 2 Kuban 0.

RUSSIA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	36	19	14	3	70	31	71
CSKA	36	17	13	6	65	39	64
Lokomotiv	36	18	9	9	55	34	63
Spartak M	36	17	11	8	56	38	62
Dynamo	36	17	8	11	56	43	59
Anzhi	36	16	11	9	43	34	59
Rubin	36	15	13	8	46	31	58
Kuban	36	15	9	12	42	35	54

14-round stage (7x2)

Relegation group

Mar 3: Volga 1 Spartak Nalchik 0; Terek 1 Tom 0.
Mar 5: Krasnodar 1 Rostov 0.
Mar 6: Amkar 2 Krylia Sovetov 1.
Mar 10: Krasnodar 1 Terek 3.
Mar 11: Rostov 1 Krylia Sovetov 0.
Mar 12: Tom 1 Volga 0; Spartak Nalchik 1 Amkar 2.
Mar 17: Volga 1 Krasnodar 2; Terek 1 Rostov 0.
Mar 18: Amkar 0 Tom 0; Krylia Sovetov 1 Spartak Nalchik 0.
Mar 24: Tom 0 Krylia Sovetov 0; Krasnodar 0 Amkar 1.
Mar 25: Rostov 2 Spartak Nalchik 1.
Mar 26: Terek 1 Volga 3.

RUSSIA – RELEGATION GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Krasnodar	36	13	9	14	45	50	48
Rostov	36	11	9	16	38	50	42
Terek	36	11	8	17	35	52	41
Amkar	36	10	11	15	28	43	41
Krylia Sovetov	36	8	11	17	24	46	35
Volga	36	10	4	22	30	47	34
Spartak N	36	6	9	21	30	49	27
Tom	36	5	11	20	21	62	26

14-round stage (7x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Mar 3: Aberdeen 1 Celtic 1; Dunfermline 0 Motherwell 2; Rangers 1 Hearts 2; Kilmarnock 0 St Johnstone 0; Hibernian 0 St Mirren 0.
Mar 5: Dundee United 3 Inverness 0.
Mar 10: Inverness 1 Kilmarnock 1.
Mar 17: Dundee United 2 Rangers 1; Motherwell 1 Aberdeen 0; St Mirren 0 St Johnstone 3.
Mar 18: Hearts 2 Hibernian 0.
Mar 24: Aberdeen 0 Inverness 1; Dunfermline 1 St Mirren 1; Hibernian 0 Dundee United 2; Kilmarnock 2 Motherwell 0; St Johnstone 2 Hearts 1.
Mar 25: Rangers 3 Celtic 2.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	31	24	3	4	64	20	75
Rangers*	31	21	4	6	60	23	57
Motherwell	31	16	6	9	41	35	54
Dundee Utd	31	12	10	9	51	40	46
St Johnstone	30	13	7	10	41	34	46
Hearts	31	12	6	13	36	31	42
Kilmarnock	31	8	13	10	34	44	37
Aberdeen	31	7	12	12	29	34	33
St Mirren	31	6	14	11	27	41	32
Inverness	30	8	7	15	34	50	31
Hibernian	31	5	8	18	30	59	23
Dunfermline	31	4	8	19	31	67	20

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group, bottom 6 will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down)
**10pts deducted for going into administration*

LEAGUE CUP

Final

Mar 18 - Glasgow (Hampden Park)
Celtic 0
Kilmarnock 1 (Van Tornhout 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 49,572. **Ref:** Collum

SERBIA

Mar 3: Borac 1 Javor 0; Novi Pazar 1 Partizan 1; Sloboda Sevojno 1 Jagodina 2; Red Star 1 Spartak 0.
Mar 4: BSK 0 Smederevo 1; Radnicki 0 Vojvodina 0; Metalac 0 Rad 1; Hajduk 1 OFK 2.
Mar 10: BSK 0 Hajduk 0; Smederevo 0 Borac 1; Javor 1 Red Star 3; Spartak 0 Radnicki 0; Vojvodina 0 Metalac 0; Rad 0 Novi Pazar 0; Jagodina 2 OFK 0; Partizan 0 Sloboda Sevojno 0.
Mar 14: Hajduk 0 Jagodina 2; OFK 1 Partizan 2; Sloboda Sevojno 0 Rad 2; Novi Pazar 1 Vojvodina 2; Metalac 0 Spartak 0; Radnicki 2 Javor 0; Borac 0 BSK 2; Red Star 4 Smederevo 0.
Mar 17: Borac 0 Hajduk 0; BSK 1 Red Star 4; Smederevo 1 Radnicki 2; Javor 1 Metalac 1; Spartak 1 Novi Pazar 0; Vojvodina 2 Sloboda Sevojno 0; Partizan 4 Jagodina 0.
Mar 18: Rad 1 OFK 0.
Mar 24: Jagodina 1 Rad 1; OFK 1 Vojvodina 0; Sloboda Sevojno 2 Spartak 0; Novi Pazar 1 Javor 0; Radnicki 1 BSK 1; Red Star 2 Borac 0.
Mar 25: Hajduk 0 Partizan 2; Metalac 0 Smederevo 1.

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	20	17	2	1	45	7	53
Red Star	20	15	2	3	41	14	47
Vojvodina	20	10	8	2	34	11	38
Radnicki	20	9	10	1	29	16	37
Jagodina	20	8	6	6	21	19	30
Spartak	20	7	9	4	15	15	30
S Sevojno	20	8	5	7	24	25	29
OFK	20	9	1	10	23	26	28
Rad	20	6	7	7	22	17	25
Smederevo	20	7	2	11	15	24	23
Hajduk	20	5	5	10	14	27	20
BSK	20	4	7	9	13	26	19
Javor	20	4	4	12	11	25	16
Novi Pazar	20	3	7	10	12	28	16
Borac	20	3	6	11	8	25	15
Metalac	20	1	7	12	9	31	10

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SLOVAKIA

Mar 3: Tatran 0 Kosice 1; Slovan 3 DAC 1; Senica 3 Nitra 1; Zilina 2 Ruzomberok 1; Spartak 1 Zlate Moravce 0.
Mar 4: Trencin 2 Dukla 2.
Mar 9: Ruzomberok 0 Spartak 0; Nitra 0 Zilina 2.
Mar 10: Tatran 1 Trencin 0; Zlate Moravce 1 Dukla 0; DAC 0 Senica 1.
Mar 11: Kosice 0 Slovan 1.
Mar 16: Senica 0 Kosice 1.
Mar 17: Dukla 2 Ruzomberok 0; Slovan 2 Tatran 0; Trencin 3 Zlate Moravce 1; Spartak 1 Nitra 2; Zilina 2 DAC 0.
Mar 23: Spartak 3 DAC 0.
Mar 24: Slovan 2 Trencin 2; Dukla 1 Nitra 1; Senica 0 Tatran 0; Zilina 1 Kosice 0; Zlate Moravce 3 Ruzomberok 5.

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilina	22	13	6	3	36	20	45
Slovan	22	12	6	4	34	23	42
Spartak	22	11	6	5	27	19	39
Senica	22	10	8	4	29	16	38
Zlate Moravce	22	9	6	7	25	25	33
Ruzomberok	22	8	8	6	31	23	32
Dukla	22	7	5	10	29	30	26
Nitra	22	5	11	6	22	24	26
Trencin	22	5	9	8	28	32	24
Kosice	22	6	6	10	21	28	24
Tatran	22	3	7	12	10	26	16
DAC	22	4	0	18	12	38	12

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated

SLOVENIA

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maribor	26	19	4	3	59	28	61
Olimpija	26	12	7	7	43	30	43
Gorica	26	12	6	8	40	28	42
Mura	26	12	5	9	34	34	41
Koper	26	10	7	9	35	29	37
Rudar	26	9	7	10	41	37	34
Domzale	26	9	5	12	32	41	32
Celje	26	8	7	11	34	38	31
Nafta	26	5	8	13	28	45	23
Triglav	26	4	4	18	10	46	16

Standings on Mar 27

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Getting the message...Sion midfielder Abdoul Yoda (left)

SWITZERLAND

Sion in trouble again

Bottom of the league after being deducted 36 points for fielding ineligible players, Sion have now been fined 25,000 Swiss francs for displaying political propaganda on their shirts during a league match.

The team displayed the slogan "Solidarity between cantons" during a match against Zurich in March. They had previously been fined for a similar stunt with the words "Tourism equals jobs" in a match in February.

Both messages appeared to be a reference to a referendum held on March 11 in which Swiss voters narrowly approved a proposal from an environmental group to limit the building of holiday homes, seen by many as a blight in Alpine villages.

TURKEY

Gala remain top

Galatasaray came from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Fenerbahce in the 369th Istanbul derby. Moussa Sow and Alex put the hosts in front at the Sukru Saracoglu stadium, but Gala hit back through Johan Elmander and Hakan Balta.

SPAIN

Saturday, March 3

Barcelona 3 (Iniesta 42, Keita 79, Xavi 87)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Barral 49) Att: 72,442

Getafe 1 (Diego Castro 42)
Malaga 3 (Eliseu 57, Toulalan 81, Cazorla 90+2) Att: 11,000

Mallorca 1 (Nsue 70)
Osasuna 1 (Cejudo 45) Att: 12,498

Rayo Vallecano 4 (Michu 45, 64, Tamudo 67, Piti 72)
Racing Santander 2 (Torrejon 9, Colsa 28) Att: 12,000

Sevilla 1 (Diawara 52)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Salvio 9) Att: 45,000

Sunday, March 4

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Susaeta 25, 81)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 37,000

Granada 0
Valencia 1 (Feghouli 32) Att: 25,000

Real Madrid 5 (Cristiano Ronaldo 23, Khedira 38, Higuain 47, 78, Kaka 66)
Espanyol 0 Att: 77,000

Zaragoza 2 (Luis Garcia 85, Abraham 90+3)
Villarreal 1 (Martinuccio 16) Att: 15,000

Monday, March 5

Levante 3 (Barkero 34, Xavi Torres 42, Kone 51)
Betis 1 (Jorge Molina 44) Att: 11,000

Saturday, March 10

Betis 2 (Jorge Molina 10, Montero 55)
Real Madrid 3 (Higuain 25, Cristiano Ronaldo 52, 73) Att: 50,000

Malaga 1 (Rondon 51)
Levante 0 Att: 28,000

Real Sociedad 3 (Agirretxe 18, 40, Vela 22)
Zaragoza 0 Att: 23,500

Sporting Gijon 1 (Andre Castro 32)
Sevilla 0 Att: 25,000

Sunday, March 11

Atletico Madrid 2 (Miranda 38, Falcao 90+2)
Granada 0 Att: 53,800

Espanyol 5 (Uche 3, 44, 68, Coutinho 10, 22)
Rayo Vallecano 1 (Tamudo 54) Att: 26,110

Osasuna 2 (Iturraspe og 9, Raul Garcia 31)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 55) Att: 16,718

Racing Santander 0
Barcelona 2 (Messi 29, pen 56) Att: 18,885

Valencia 2 (Tino Costa 23, Aduriz 42)
Mallorca 2 (Nsue 57, Victor 66) Att: 35,000

Monday, March 12

Villarreal 1 (Nilmar pen 44)
Getafe 2 (Diego Castro 6, Barrada 72) Att: 18,000

Saturday, March 17

Getafe 1 (Inigo Martinez og 80)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 7,500

Granada 2 (Martins 2, Siqueira 24)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Colunga 90+2) Att: 22,500

Rayo Vallecano 3 (Armenteros 51, Diego Costa 77, Tamudo 90+1)
Betis 0 Att: 9,216

Sevilla 0
Barcelona 2 (Xavi 18, Messi 25) Att: 45,000

Zaragoza 1 (Helder Postiga 86)
Osasuna 1 (Roversio 88) Att: 22,000

Sunday, March 18

Athletic Bilbao 0
Valencia 3 (Soldado 41, 57, pen 85) Att: 39,000

Levante 1 (Xavi Torres 90+1)
Villarreal 0 Att: 12,200

Mallorca 2 (Godin og 47, Pereira 49)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Falcao 66) Att: 16,857

Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 35)
Malaga 1 (Cazorla 90+2) Att: 75,000

Monday, March 19

Espanyol 3 (Verdu 26, Coutinho 33, Moreno 80)
Racing Santander 1 (Stuani 12) Att: 18,223

Tuesday, March 20

Barcelona 5 (Xavi 4, Messi 17, 68, 88, Tello 84)
Granada 3 (Mainz 55, Siqueira pen 62, pen 90) Att: 62,401

Osasuna 0
Getafe 0 Att: 14,084

Wednesday, March 21

Atletico Madrid 2 (Falcao 50, 70)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Javi Martinez 90) Att: 30,000

Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 6)
Levante 3 (Barkero pen 11, Kone 45, Xavi Torres 90+3) Att: 19,500

Sporting Gijon 2 (Colunga 38, Botia 66)
Mallorca 3 (Nunes 30, Orfila og 47, Alvaro 77) Att: 19,500

Valencia 1 (Pablo 9)
Zaragoza 2 (Apono pen 30, 76) Att: 29,500

Villarreal 1 (Senna 83)
Real Madrid 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo 62) Att: 20,500

Thursday, March 22

Betis 1 (Ruben Castro 79)
Espanyol 1 (Pandiani 90+3) Att: 35,000

Malaga 4 (Rondon 35, 58, Maresca 70, Duda 86)
Rayo Vallecano 2 (Diego Costa pen 5, Trashorras pen 84) Att: 30,000

Racing Santander 0
Sevilla 3 (Jesus Navas 34, Manu 52, 90+3) Att: 13,998

Saturday, March 24

Getafe 3 (Pedro Rios 12, Fedor 24, Bruno og 30)
Valencia 1 (Soldado 5) Att: 8,000

Mallorca 0
Barcelona 2 (Messi 25, Pique 78) Att: 22,284

Real Madrid 5 (Higuain 5, Cristiano Ronaldo 32, 56, Benzema 40, 49)
Real Sociedad 1 (Xabi Prieto 40) Att: 80,000

Sunday, March 25

Athletic Bilbao 1 (De Marcos 77)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Lora 90) Att: 38,000

Betis 1 (Santa Cruz 18)
Racing Santander 1 (Stuani 78) Att: 34,000

Espanyol 1 (Coutinho 24)
Malaga 2 (Van Nistelrooy 76, Demichelis 77) Att: 26,132

Levante 0
Osasuna 2 (Raul Garcia 16, Nino 79) Att: 11,197

Rayo Vallecano 0
Villarreal 2 (Ruben 29, Angel Lopez 84) Att: 9,652

Zaragoza 1 (Apono pen 90+5)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 30,000

Monday, March 26

Granada 0
Sevilla 3 (Negredo 39, Manu 54, 90+2) Att: 22,500

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	29	24	3	2	95	26	75
Barcelona	29	21	6	2	84	22	69
Valencia	29	13	8	8	45	36	47
Malaga	29	14	5	10	44	41	47
Levante	29	13	5	11	41	40	44
Osasuna	29	10	13	6	34	41	43
Espanyol	29	11	7	11	37	39	40
Atletico	29	10	9	10	39	35	39
Sevilla	29	10	9	10	33	31	39
Getafe	29	10	9	10	31	36	39
Athletic	29	9	11	9	44	40	38
Rayo	29	11	4	14	42	49	37
Mallorca	29	9	9	11	31	37	36
Sociedad	29	9	6	14	32	45	33
Betis	29	9	5	15	33	43	32
Villarreal	29	7	10	12	30	42	31
Granada	29	9	4	16	27	46	31
Racing	29	4	13	12	23	44	25
Gijon	29	6	7	16	28	54	25
Zaragoza	29	6	7	16	25	51	25

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

35 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
35 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
19 Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)
18 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)
16 Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)
16 Roberto Soldado (Valencia)

SPANISH CUP

Final

Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona (May 25)

SWITZERLAND

Mar 3: Thun 1 Servette 0; Zurich 0 Sion 1.
Mar 4: Lausanne 0 Young Boys 0; Basle 3 Lucerne 1.
Mar 10: Grasshopper 0 Basle 2; Sion 1 Thun 0.
Mar 11: Lausanne 0 Zurich 1; Servette 2 Lucerne 1.
Mar 17: Grasshopper 2 Young Boys 0; Lucerne 0 Sion 0.
Mar 18: Servette 1 Zurich 1; Thun 2 Lausanne 0.
Mar 24: Basle 5 Servette 0.
Mar 25: Lucerne 1 Grasshopper 0; Sion 1 Lausanne 0; Young Boys 4 Thun 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	24	15	7	2	51	20	52
Lucerne	26	11	8	7	32	22	41
Young Boys	25	10	8	7	36	24	38
Thun	25	9	7	9	27	28	34
Servette	25	10	4	11	33	41	34
Zurich	25	8	6	11	32	31	30
Grasshopper	25	7	2	16	22	45	23
Lausanne	24	3	5	16	16	48	14
Sion*	25	12	6	7	29	19	6
Xamax (R)**	18	7	5	6	22	22	26

34-round season (8x4 + 2 v Xamax); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

**36pts deducted for fielding ineligible players in 12 league games*

***Xamax had licence revoked during winter break after failing to submit the required financial documents. They will be demoted at the end of the season. Their results up to the winter break (18 rounds) stood; remaining matches cancelled*

TURKEY

Regular season

Mar 3: Ankaragucu 2 Eskisehirspor 5; Mersin 1 Orduspor 0; Antalyaspor 0 Samsunspor 2; Fenerbahce 6 Genclerbirligi 1.
Mar 4: Bursaspor 3 Karabukspor 0; Gaziantepspor 5 Istanbul BB 0; Kayserispor 2 Manisaspor 0; Besiktas 1 Trabzonspor 2.
Mar 5: Sivasspor 0 Galatasaray 4.
Mar 9: Ankaragucu 0 Fenerbahce 2.
Mar 10: Istanbul BB 1 Kayserispor 0; Galatasaray 2 Genclerbirligi 0.
Mar 11: Samsunspor 0 Gaziantepspor 0; Manisaspor 2 Mersin 0; Karabukspor 2 Antalyaspor 1; Orduspor 1 Besiktas 1; Eskisehirspor 1 Bursaspor 1.
Mar 12: Trabzonspor 2 Sivasspor 1.
Mar 16: Genclerbirligi 1 Trabzonspor 1.
Mar 17: Antalyaspor 0 Eskisehirspor 0; Sivasspor 1 Orduspor 1; Bursaspor 2 Ankaragucu 1; Fenerbahce 2 Galatasaray 2.
Mar 18: Mersin 2 Istanbul BB 0; Kayserispor 2 Samsunspor 0; Gaziantepspor 3 Karabukspor 0.
Mar 19: Besiktas 4 Manisaspor 1.
Mar 24: Fenerbahce 1 Bursaspor 0.
Mar 25: Orduspor 0 Genclerbirligi 0; Ankaragucu 0 Antalyaspor 3; Samsunspor 2 Mersin 0; Manisaspor 1 Sivasspor 3; Karabukspor 1 Kayserispor 0; Eskisehirspor 0 Gaziantepspor 2; Galatasaray 1 Trabzonspor 1.
Mar 26: Istanbul BB 2 Besiktas 2.

TURKEY – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	32	21	8	3	63	24	71
Fenerbahce	32	19	7	6	58	33	64
Trabzonspor	32	15	9	8	59	39	54
Besiktas	32	15	9	8	49	37	54
Sivasspor	32	12	11	9	55	52	47
Bursaspor	32	12	10	10	41	32	46
Genclerbirligi	32	12	10	10	46	47	46
Eskisehirspor	32	13	7	12	38	39	46
Istanbul BB	32	12	8	12	46	49	44
Gaziantepspor	32	11	9	12	37	33	42
Mersin	32	12	6	14	34	41	42
Orduspor	32	10	11	11	28	32	41
Kayserispor	32	12	4	16	35	37	40
Karabukspor	32	12	4	16	41	55	40
Antalyaspor	32	10	9	13	31	37	39
Samsunspor	32	8	9	15	34	45	33
Manisaspor	32	8	8	16	31	45	32
Ankaragucu	32	2	5	25	22	71	11

34-round regular season (17x2); top 4 will form championship group, 5th to 8th will form Europa League-place group, bottom 3 will be relegated

COLOMBIA

Gomez's first win

Independiente Medellin recorded their first victory of the apertura campaign under ex-national team coach Hernan Dario Gomez, beating city rivals Atletico Nacional 2-1.

Deportivo Pasto became the first Colombian club to be fined for racist acts by its supporters after La Equidad players Dahwling Leudo and Carmelo Valencia were abused in Pasto's 3-1 win.

PARAGUAY

Still unbeaten

A goal from Pablo Zeballos gave Olimpia a 1-0 victory away to Guarani to secure their position at the top of the apertura table and see them remain as the only unbeaten side in the league.

Going out...Manuel Ugaz (left) of Juan Aurich

PERU

Early elimination

Juan Aurich became the first team to be eliminated from the group stage of this year's Libertadores Cup when a 2-0 loss to defending champions Santos made it four defeats in four games for last year's Peruvian champions.

Edu Dracena and Neymar scored for the Brazilian side in a match that was delayed at half-time because of a power failure at the Pacaembu stadium in Sao Paulo.

URUGUAY

Late comeback

Two down with a minute left, Tanque Sisley beat Cerrito with goals from Gonzalo Pizzichillo, Miguel Murillo and Gonzalo Curbelo.

UKRAINE

Mar 3: Zorya 5 Karpaty 1; Oleksandria 0 Volyn 1; Chornomorets 1 Illichivets 0; Metalist 1 Obolon 0.
Mar 4: Vorskla 2 Kryvbas 1; Shakhtar 1 Dnipro 1; Dynamo 1 Arsenal 0.
Mar 9: Obolon 1 Oleksandria 1.
Mar 10: Illichivets 1 Shakhtar 2; Dnipro 1 Vorskla 1; Volyn 0 Chornomorets 2.
Mar 11: Metalurh 1 Metalist 1; Karpaty 2 Tavriya 3; Kryvbas 0 Dynamo 3; Arsenal 1 Zorya 1.
Mar 16: Zorya 2 Kryvbas 0.
Mar 17: Tavriya 1 Arsenal 1; Shakhtar 4 Chornomorets 0; Vorskla 3 Illichivets 1.
Mar 18: Obolon 1 Volyn 0; Dynamo 2 Dnipro 0; Oleksandria 0 Metalurh 0.
Mar 19: Metalist 3 Karpaty 1.
Mar 23: Volyn 1 Shakhtar 2.
Mar 24: Arsenal 4 Metalist 2; Dnipro 3 Zorya 1; Metalurh 2 Obolon 0.
Mar 25: Illichivets 0 Dynamo 1; Chornomorets 2 Vorskla 1; Kryvbas 0 Tavriya 3; Karpaty 1 Oleksandria 1.

UKRAINE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	24	20	4	0	48	8	64
Shakhtar	24	19	4	1	63	15	61
Metalist	24	16	6	2	45	22	54
Dnipro	24	11	5	8	36	30	38
Tavriya	23	10	7	6	36	27	37
Arsenal	24	9	8	7	29	22	35
Metalurh	23	10	4	9	28	23	34
Vorskla	24	8	7	9	32	34	31
Kryvbas	24	9	4	11	19	29	31
Chornomorets	24	8	6	10	22	30	30
Illichivets	24	6	5	13	22	37	23
Volyn	24	6	4	14	20	36	22
Zorya	24	5	4	15	24	45	19
Karpaty	24	3	8	13	22	42	17
Oleksandria	24	3	8	13	19	42	17
Obolon	24	3	6	15	12	35	15

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

WALES

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full points and goals record

WALES – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Saints	29	21	4	4	68	30	67
Bangor	29	20	3	6	65	37	63
Neath	29	17	8	4	55	26	59
Llanelli	28	15	4	9	53	33	49
Bala	28	13	7	8	44	34	46
Prestatyn	29	8	4	17	36	55	28

Standings on Mar 27
10-round stage (5x2)

WALES – RELEGATION GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Airbus UK	28	9	8	11	44	44	35
Afan Lido	28	7	11	10	36	42	32
Port Talbot	28	7	7	14	33	45	28
Aberystwyth*	28	5	10	13	37	46	24
Carmarthen	28	7	2	19	27	63	23
Newtown**	28	5	4	19	32	75	16

Standings on Mar 27
10-round stage (5x2); bottom 2 will be relegated
**1pt deducted for fielding ineligible player*
***3pts deducted for fielding ineligible players*

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group 1

Mar 7
Santos (Bra) 3 (Neymar pen 18, 53, 64)
Internacional (Bra) 1 (Leandro Damiao 63)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roman (Bra)

Mar 13
Internacional 5 (Dagoberto 3, Leandro Damiao 6, 56, 72, Jo 80)
The Strongest (Bol) 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Arias (Par)

Mar 15
Juan Aurich (Per) 1 (Tejada 14)
Santos 3 (Fucile 35, Ganso 39, Borges 68)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)
Sent off: Guadalupe (Juan Aurich) 57min

Mar 21
The Strongest 1 (Ramallo 46)
Internacional 1 (Gilberto 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ponce (Ecu)

Mar 22
Santos 2 (Edu Dracena 15, Neymar 58)
Juan Aurich 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	4	3	0	1	9	4	9
Internacional	4	2	1	1	9	4	7
The Strongest	4	2	1	1	5	8	7
Juan Aurich	4	0	0	4	2	9	0

Group 2

Mar 8
Flamengo (Bra) 1 (Vagner Love 48)
Emelec (Ecu) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)
Sent off: De Jesus (Emelec) 45min

Mar 13
Lanus (Arg) 1 (Pavone 71)
Emelec 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)
Sent off: J L Quinonez (Emelec) 36min

Mar 15
Flamengo 3 (Bottinelli 37, Ronaldinho pen 56, Luiz Antonio 63)
Olimpia (Par) 3 (Zeballos 76, L Caballero 84, Marin 88)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)

Mar 20
Emelec 0
Lanus 2 (Regueiro 5, pen 87)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lanus	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Flamengo	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Olimpia	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Emelec	4	1	0	3	1	4	3

Group 3

Mar 6
Union Espanola (Chl) 1 (Herrera 45)
Universidad Catolica (Chl) 1 (Andia 38)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Puga (Chl)
Sent off: Silva 88min, Valenzuela 90+4min (both Univ Catolica)

Mar 8
Atletico Junior (Col) 0
Bolivar (Bol) 1 (Ferreira 80)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Soto (Ven)

Mar 20
Bolivar 2 (Alvarez 30, Campos 39)
Atletico Junior 1 (Ruiz 67)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Rivera (Per)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
U Espanola	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Bolivar	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
Univ Catolica	3	0	3	0	4	4	3
At Junior	4	0	1	3	3	7	1

Group 4

Mar 7
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Somoza 46)
Fluminense (Bra) 2 (Fred 9, Deco 54)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)

Mar 14
Arsenal (Arg) 1 (Rodriguez og 9)
Boca Juniors 2 (Mouche 28, Ledesma 67)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Lunati (Arg)

Mar 14
Fluminense 1 (Anderson 57)
Zamora (Ven) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Polic (Chl)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fluminense	3	3	0	0	4	1	9
Boca Juniors	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Arsenal	3	1	0	2	4	3	3
Zamora	3	0	1	2	0	4	1

Group 5

Mar 6
Vasco da Gama (Bra) 3 (Ramos og 20, Dede 59, Juninho pen 80)
Alianza Lima (Per) 2 (Charquero 17, Ibanez 85)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Abal (Arg)
Sent off: Carmona (Alianza) 48min

Mar 13
Alianza Lima 1 (Fernandez 15)
Nacional (Uru) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Sent off: Damonte 59min, Placente 69min (both Nacional)

Mar 14
Libertad (Par) 1 (Nunez 69)
Vasco da Gama 1 (Diego Souza 16)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)
Sent off: Diego Souza (Vasco) 52min; Nunez (Libertad) 81min

Mar 21
Vasco da Gama 2 (Juninho 52, Alecsandro 61)
Libertad 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 5	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Vasco	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Nacional (Uru)	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Alianza Lima	3	1	0	2	4	7	3

Group 6

Mar 7
Corinthians (Bra) 2 (Danilo 38, Jorge Henrique 67)
Nacional (Par) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

Mar 13
Nacional 3 (Cano pen 50, 72, Torales 81)
Deportivo Tachira (Ven) 2 (Fernandez 30, Chourio 79)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Intriago (Ecu)
Sent off: Clavijo 48min, Fernandez 86min (both Tachira)

Mar 14
Cruz Azul (Mex) 0
Corinthians 0
Ref: Vera (Ecu)

Mar 21
Corinthians 1 (Danilo 35)
Cruz Azul 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)
Sent off: Pinto (Cruz Azul) 71min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians	4	2	2	0	4	1	8
Cruz Azul	4	2	1	1	6	2	7
Nacional (Par)	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Dep Tachira	3	0	1	2	3	8	1

Group 7

Mar 7
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) 3 (Alustiza pen 45+3, Martinez 47, Saritama 70)
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)

Mar 13
Guadalajara (Mex) 1 (Fierro 10)
Defensor Sporting (Uru) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Escalante (Ven)

Mar 22
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Martinez 89)
Deportivo Quito 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Seneme (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 7	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Dep Quito	4	1	1	2	4	4	4
Guadalajara	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Defensor	3	1	0	2	2	4	3

Group 8

Mar 6
Penarol (Uru) 1 (Freitas 21)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 1 (Fernandes 34)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ponce (Ecu)

Mar 8
Godoy Cruz (Arg) 4 (Caruso 8, 68, 89, Ramirez 33)
Atletico Nacional (Col) 4 (Mosquera 13, Sigali og 29, Pabon 54, 69)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Vuaden (Bra)

USA

Spurs tour States

English FA Cup semi-finalists Tottenham Hotspur will play New York Red Bulls on July 31 in the inaugural New York Invitational Cup.

A week earlier, on July 24, the Premier League club take on Los Angeles Galaxy, who include ex-Spurs striker Robbie Keane in their ranks.

Closed...Port Said Stadium

EGYPT

League cancelled

The 2011-12 Premier League season, which was suspended after 74 fans died following the game between Al Masry and Al Ahly in Port Said at the beginning of February, has been officially cancelled.

A plan to play a tournament behind closed doors instead has also been scrapped due to a lack of security assurances.

The Egyptian Football Association have also banned Al Masry for a year and closed their home ground for three years.

GHANA

Cup winners pull out

Nania, founded and coached by former Marseille and Ghana star Abedi Pele, have

No money...Ghana legend Pele

CLUB FOOTBALL

Mar 22
Atletico Nacional 2 (Mosquera 2, pen 61)
Godoy Cruz 2 (Curbelo 23, Castillon 34)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)
Sent off: Sigali (Godoy Cruz) 90+1min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Nacional	4	2	2	0	12	6	8
Godoy Cruz	4	1	2	1	8	11	5
Univ Chile	3	1	1	1	6	4	4
Penarol	3	0	1	2	1	6	1

Games to be completed by Apr 19

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

Clausura

Mar 2: Newell's 0 Belgrano 2; Banfield 1 Godoy Cruz 1.
Mar 3: All Boys 0 Velez 0; San Martin 0 Estudiantes 1; Independiente 1 Argentinos 3.
Mar 4: Union 2 Colon 2; San Lorenzo 0 Boca 2; Arsenal 0 Racing 0; Tigre 1 Lanus 0.
Mar 5: Olimpo 2 Rafaela 1.
Mar 9: Estudiantes 1 Lanus 0; Colon 0 Newell's 3.
Mar 10: Argentinos 1 San Martin 1; Belgrano 1 San Lorenzo 2; Racing 3 All Boys 0.
Mar 11: Godoy Cruz 0 Arsenal 1; Banfield 0 Tigre 2; Boca 4 Independiente 5; Rafaela 0 Union 2.
Mar 12: Velez 1 Olimpo 0.
Mar 16: All Boys 1 Godoy Cruz 1; Lanus 0 Argentinos 1.
Mar 17: Tigre 1 Estudiantes 1; Union 3 Velez 3; Independiente 2 Belgrano 0; Olimpo 0 Racing 3.
Mar 18: San Lorenzo 1 Colon 1; Newell's 1 Rafaela 0; San Martin 0 Boca 1; Arsenal 1 Banfield 0.
Mar 23: Banfield 0 All Boys 0.
Mar 24: Rafaela 2 San Lorenzo 1; Belgrano 1 San Martin 1; Racing 0 Union 3.
Mar 25: Argentinos 1 Estudiantes 2; Colon 3 Independiente 0; Arsenal 1 Tigre 0; Boca 2 Lanus 2.
Mar 26: Godoy Cruz 1 Olimpo 1; Velez 0 Newell's 1.

ARGENTINA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Estudiantes	7	4	3	0	9	4	15
Boca	7	4	2	1	13	7	14
Tigre	7	4	2	1	9	3	14
Newell's	7	4	1	2	7	5	13
Velez	7	3	3	1	12	7	12
Arsenal	7	3	3	1	7	5	12
Union	7	2	4	1	10	6	10
All Boys	7	2	4	1	4	4	10
Colon	7	2	3	2	9	9	9
Racing	7	2	2	3	7	6	8
Argentinos	7	2	2	3	6	6	8
San Martin	7	2	2	3	7	8	8
Belgrano	7	2	2	3	6	9	8
San Lorenzo	7	2	2	3	7	11	8
Lanus	7	2	1	4	8	9	7
Rafaela	7	2	1	4	8	9	7
Godoy Cruz	7	1	4	2	5	7	7
Olimpo	7	2	1	4	8	12	7
Independiente	7	2	0	5	8	14	6
Banfield	7	1	2	4	3	12	5

19-round tournament (19x1); the 2 teams with the lowest average points tallies over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated, the teams with 3rd & 4th lowest average tallies will enter rel/prom play-offs

BOLIVIA

BOLIVIA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Blooming	11	7	2	2	16	10	23
San Jose	11	5	4	2	23	14	19
Nacional	11	5	3	3	15	15	18
La Paz	11	5	2	4	15	15	17
Oriente	11	5	2	4	15	16	17
Universitario	11	4	3	4	17	10	15
Bolivar	10	2	8	0	16	9	14
Mamore	10	4	2	4	11	13	14
Aurora	11	4	2	5	13	16	14
Real Potosi	11	3	1	7	14	19	10
The Strongest	10	2	3	5	13	15	9
Guabira	10	1	2	7	11	27	5

Standings on Mar 27
22-round tournament (11x2); the team with the worst average points tally in the combined 2011-12 season (adecuacion, apertura & clausura) will be relegated, teams with 2nd and 3rd worst averages will enter rel/prom play-offs

CHILE

CHILE – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile	9	7	1	1	24	10	22
O'Higgins	9	6	1	2	16	8	19
Wanderers	9	5	1	3	17	13	16
Univ Catolica	9	4	3	2	12	9	15
Huachipato	9	4	2	3	15	13	14
Espanola	9	4	1	4	22	17	13
Iquique	9	3	4	2	12	7	13
Colo Colo	9	3	3	3	9	8	12
Antofagasta	9	3	3	3	5	6	12
La Serena	9	3	3	3	14	16	12
Cobreloa	9	3	2	4	13	15	11
Palestino	9	3	2	4	11	15	11
Rangers	9	3	1	5	8	14	10
La Calera	9	2	4	3	9	9	10
U Concepcion	9	2	3	4	12	16	9
Audax Italiano	9	2	2	5	11	20	8
San Felipe	9	1	5	3	6	7	8
Cobresal	9	1	3	5	11	24	6

Standings on Mar 27
17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

COLOMBIA

COLOMBIA – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Huila	9	5	3	1	13	4	18
Tolima	9	5	3	1	13	8	18
Itagui	9	4	3	2	13	9	15
La Equidad	9	4	3	2	11	8	15
Patriotas	9	4	3	2	7	8	15
Junior	9	4	2	3	14	11	14
Envigado	9	3	4	2	16	14	13
Ind Santa Fe	9	2	6	1	12	10	12
Ind Medellin	9	3	3	3	9	9	12
Pasto	9	2	5	2	10	8	11
Dep Cali	9	3	2	4	8	13	11
Nacional	9	3	1	5	14	10	10
Millonarios	9	2	4	3	10	11	10
Cartagena	9	2	4	3	11	15	10
Once Caldas	9	2	3	4	13	11	9
Chico	9	2	3	4	7	14	9
Cucuta	9	2	1	6	5	15	7
Quindio	9	0	5	4	9	17	5

Standings on Mar 27
18-round regular season (17x1 + 1 round of "clasicos"); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

ECUADOR

ECUADOR – 1ST STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Emelec	6	4	1	1	10	5	13
LDU Quito	7	3	2	2	11	5	11
Independiente	7	3	2	2	8	6	11
LDU Loja	7	3	2	2	5	6	11
Macara	7	3	1	3	7	6	10
Barcelona	6	2	3	1	9	4	9
Manta	7	2	3	2	6	5	9
El Nacional	6	2	3	1	5	6	9
Dep Quito	6	2	2	2	10	6	8
Cuenca	7	2	2	3	7	13	8
Tecnico Univ	7	1	4	2	6	6	7
Olmedo	7	0	1	6	1	17	1

Standings on Mar 27
22-round stage (11x2); winning team will meet winner of 2nd stage in the overall championship play-off; no relegation after 1st stage

PARAGUAY

PARAGUAY – APERTURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	8	6	2	0	13	7	20
Cerro Porteno	8	6	0	2	17	11	18
Nacional	8	5	0	3	13	8	15
Guarani	8	4	1	3	15	10	13
Sol America	8	4	0	4	19	14	12
Libertad	8	3	3	2	9	6	12
Carapegua	8	3	2	3	12	10	11
Luqueno	8	3	2	3	11	10	11
Rubio Nu	8	3	0	5	12	17	9
C Porteno PF	8	2	2	4	7	12	8
Independiente	8	1	2	5	10	19	5
Tacuary	8	0	2	6	6	20	2

Standings on Mar 27
22-round tournament (11x2); no relegation after apertura

PERU

PERU – 1ST STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cristal	5	4	1	0	14	4	13
Cesar Vallejo	5	4	0	1	9	3	12
Garcilaso	5	3	1	1	7	6	10
Melgar	5	3	0	2	9	5	9
Jose Galvez	5	2	3	0	6	3	9
Cienciano	5	2	1	2	7	6	7
Leon	5	2	1	2	8	8	7
Juan Aurich	5	2	1	2	6	7	7
Huancayo	4	2	0	2	3	4	6
Alianza Lima	4	1	1	2	6	8	4
Inti Gas	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Comercio	5	1	1	3	6	9	4
Cobresol	5	1	1	3	4	7	4
Sport Boys	5	1	1	3	3	9	4
Universitario*	5	0	3	2	2	4	2
San Martin	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Standings on Mar 27
30-round stage (15x2); all teams will continue into the 2nd stage, in which they will be divided into 2 round-robin groups of 8 – the winner of each of those groups will meet to decide the champions; no relegation after 1st stage
**1pt deducted*

URUGUAY

URUGUAY – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	5	5	0	0	10	4	15
Penarol	4	4	0	0	14	5	12
Nacional	5	3	1	1	11	6	10
Defensor	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Cerro Largo	5	2	1	2	9	7	7
Cerro	5	2	1	2	8	7	7
Tanque Sisley	5	2	1	2	5	5	7
Rampla	5	2	1	2	8	9	7
Wanderers	5	1	3	1	8	9	6
Danubio	5	1	3	1	7	8	6
River Plate	5	1	1	3	8	10	4
Racing	5	1	1	3	7	10	4
Cerrito	5	1	1	3	6	11	4
Rentistas	5	0	3	2	2	7	3
Bella Vista	5	0	2	3	6	11	2
Fenix	5	0	2	3	1	6	2

Standings on Mar 27
15-round championship (15x1); the 3 teams with the lowest average points tallies over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

VENEZUELA

VENEZUELA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lara	10	7	3	0	22	8	24
Mineros	11	6	5	0	19	8	23
Caracas	10	6	2	2	16	11	20
Anzoategui	10	5	4	1	10	6	19
Llaneros	11	5	3	3	13	9	18
Aragua	11	5	2	4	12	10	17
Zamora	11	4	3	4	15	15	15
Esppor	11	4	3	4	7	8	15
Zulia	10	5	0	5	7	8	15
Monagas	11	4	2	5	10	10	14
Yaracuyanos	11	3	4	4	13	14	13
Tachira	11	3	3	5	9	12	12
Carabobo	10	2	4	4	6	8	10
Trujillanos	11	1	7	3	7	11	10
El Vigia	10	3	1	6	7	15	10
Estudiantes	10	2	3	5	8	12	9
Petare	10	1	5	4	11	15	8
Tucanes	11	1	2	8	11	23	5

Standings on Mar 27
17-round tournament (17x1); bottom 2 in combined apertura/clausura table will be relegated

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Mar 6-8; 2nd legs - Mar 13-15
Isidro Metapan (ESv) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
2-1, 0-8 (agg 2-9)
Monarcas Morelia (Mex) v Monterrey (Mex)
1-3, 1-4 (agg 2-7)
Seattle Sounders (USA) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
2-1, 1-6 (agg 3-7)
Toronto (Can) v Los Angeles Galaxy (USA)
2-2, 2-1 (agg 4-3)

MEXICO

Clausura

Regular season
Mar 2: Tecos 0 Tijuana 2.
Mar 3: Santos 5 San Luis 2; Tigres 1 Atlante 0; Atlas 0 Pachuca 0; Cruz Azul 4 Monterrey 3; Queretaro 0 Morelia 3.
Mar 4: Toluca 0 Pumas 2; America 2 Jaguares 0; Puebla 1 Guadalajara 2.

been banned from international competition for three years by CAF after they withdrew from the Confederation Cup two days before they were due to host Sequence of Guinea.

Nania, who last year became the first team from the second tier to win the Ghanaian Cup, claimed major sponsors pulled out, leaving them without funds for a continental campaign.

KENYA

New coach, no change

Gor Mahia sacked their Cameroonian coach Anaba Awono ahead of the return leg of their CAF Confederation Cup preliminary game against Ferroviario of Mozambique.

John "Bobby" Ogolla stood in as coach but could not prevent his side going out 4-0 on aggregate.

SOUTH AFRICA

Pirates crash out

Orlando Pirates were the biggest casualty in the preliminary round of the CAF Champions League, going out 4-2 on aggregate to Recreativo do Libolo of Angola.

Mamelodi Sundowns set a new national record for the biggest-ever win when they thrashed amateur side Powerlines 24-0 in the first round of the South African Cup. Hlompho Kekana scored seven of their goals.

TUNISIA

Benzarti is back

Former national coach Faouzi Benzarti is back in charge of Etoile Sahel for a fourth time, replacing Bernd Krauss who remains youth technical director.

Fourth time...Benzarti

Mar 9: Tijuana 1 America 1; Morelia 1 Toluca 2.
Mar 10: Monterrey 4 Queretaro 1; Jaguares 2 Tigres 2; Santos 3 Puebla 1; Guadalajara 2 Cruz Azul 1; San Luis 0 Pachuca 0; Atlante 0 Atlas 0.
Mar 11: Pumas 0 Tecos 0.
Mar 16: Tecos 1 Morelia 2.
Mar 17: Cruz Azul 0 Santos 1; Pachuca 3 Atlante 2; Tigres 1 Tijuana 0; Atlas 0 Jaguares 3; Queretaro 0 Guadalajara 0.
Mar 18: Toluca 1 Monterrey 1; Puebla 0 San Luis 1; America 2 Pumas 1.
Mar 22: Jaguares 3 Pachuca 2.
Mar 23: Morelia 3 America 1.
Mar 24: Monterrey 4 Tecos 0; Santos 2 Queretaro 0; Guadalajara 2 Toluca 0; Tijuana 2 Atlas 0; San Luis 2 Atlante 3.
Mar 25: Pumas 0 Tigres 2; Puebla 1 Cruz Azul 1.

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	12	8	2	2	22	12	26
Morelia	12	8	2	2	21	11	26
Tigres	12	7	4	1	15	7	25
Monterrey	12	6	4	2	23	11	22
America	12	6	4	2	19	10	22
Tijuana	12	5	5	2	14	8	20
Pachuca	12	4	6	2	17	13	18
Toluca	12	5	3	4	18	16	18
Jaguares	12	5	1	6	17	16	16
Cruz Azul	12	3	6	3	15	14	15
Guadalajara	12	4	3	5	10	13	15
Atlante	12	4	2	6	15	21	14
Atlas	12	2	6	4	4	10	12
Pumas	12	2	5	5	10	12	11
San Luis	12	3	2	7	9	19	11
Puebla	12	2	3	7	11	17	9
Tecos	12	1	3	8	6	20	6
Queretaro	12	1	3	8	7	23	6

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; the team with the lowest average points tally over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

UNITED STATES

Regular season

Mar 10: DC United 0 Kansas City 1; Los Angeles 1 Salt Lake 3; San Jose 1 New England 0; Colorado 2 Columbus 0; Vancouver 2 Montreal 0.
Mar 11: Dallas 2 New York 1; Chivas 0 Houston 1.
Mar 12: Portland 3 Philadelphia 1.
Mar 17: Dallas 1 Portland 1; Kansas City 3 New England 0; Seattle 3 Toronto 1; Salt Lake 2 New York 0; Chivas 0 Vancouver 1; Montreal 1 Chicago 1; San Jose 0 Houston 1.
Mar 18: Philadelphia 1 Colorado 2; Los Angeles 3 DC United 1.
Mar 23: Seattle 2 Houston 0.
Mar 24: Toronto 0 San Jose 3; New England 1 Portland 0; Columbus 2 Montreal 0; Chicago 1 Philadelphia 0; Salt Lake 0 Chivas 1; Vancouver 0 DC United 0.
Mar 25: New York 4 Colorado 1; Kansas City 2 Dallas 1.

USA – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kansas City	3	3	0	0	6	1	9
Houston	3	2	0	1	2	2	6
Chicago	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
New York	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Columbus	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
New England	3	1	0	2	1	4	3
DC United	3	0	1	2	1	4	1
Montreal	3	0	1	2	1	5	1
Philadelphia	3	0	0	3	2	6	0
Toronto	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

34-round regular season (7x3 & 2x2 in own conference, 9x1 in western conference)

USA – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vancouver	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Seattle	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Salt Lake	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
San Jose	3	2	0	1	4	1	6
Colorado	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Portland	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Dallas	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Los Angeles	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Chivas	3	1	0	2	1	2	3

34-round regular season (8x3 in own conference, 10x1 in eastern conference)

Top 5 in both conferences will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Feb 18-Mar 10; 2nd legs - Mar 2-18
Amadou Diallo (IvC) v Diables Noirs (Con)
1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0)
ASFA Yennenga (BuF) v ASO Chlef (Alg)
0-0, 1-4 (agg 1-4)
ASGNN (Ngr) v Tonnerre d'Abomey (Ben)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Brikama United (Gam) v US Ouakam (Sen)
0-1, 1-0 (agg 1-1, Brikama 3-1 on pens)
Coin Nord (Com) v Ethiopian Coffee (Eth)
1-0, 1-4 (agg 2-4)
DFC Beme (CAR) v Astres Douala (Cam)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, DFC Beme on away goals)
Foullah Edifice (Chd) v JSM Bejaia (Alg)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Green Mamba (Swa) v Platinum (Zim)
2-4, 0-4 (agg 2-8)
Japan Actuel's (Mad) v Power Dynamos (Zam)
1-5, 0-3 (agg 1-8)
LISCR (Lbr) v Berekum Chelsea (Gha)
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
Mafunzo (Zan) v Liga Muculmana (Moz)
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
Missile (Gab) v Africa Sports (IvC)
3-2, 0-2 (agg 3-4)
Orlando Pirates (SAf) v Recreativo Libolo (Ang)
1-3, 1-1 (agg 2-4)
Ports Authority (SLe) v Horoya (Gui)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Revenue Authority (Uga) v Correctional Services (Les)
3-0, 0-0 (agg 3-0)
Sony Ela Nguema (EqG) v Dolphin (Nga)
0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6)
Tusker (Ken) v APR (Rwa)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Vita Club (DRC) v Atletico Olympic (Bdi)
5-0, 1-4 (agg 6-4)
Young Africans (Tan) v Zamalek (Egy)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

Byes to next round
Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Merreikh (Sud), Coton Sport (Cam), Djoliba (Mli), Dynamos (Zim), Esperance (Tun), Etoile Sahel (Tun), Maghreb Fes (Mor), Raja Casablanca (Mor), Stade Malien (Mli), Sunshine Stars (Nga), TP Mazembe (DRC)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Feb 17-19; 2nd legs - Mar 3-10
AC Leopard (Con) v Tempete Mocaf (CAR)
2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2)
Black Leopards (SAf) v Motor Action (Zim)
1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1)
Dragons de l'Oueme (Ben) v Etoile Filante (BuF)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Extension Gunners (Bot) v Tana (Mad)
2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Ferroviario Maputo (Moz) v Gor Mahia (Ken)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
Gamtel (Gam) v Casa Sport (Sen)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Gamtel 4-3 on pens)
Jamhuri (Zan) v Hwange Colliery (Zim)
0-3, 1-4 (agg 1-7)
Kiyovu (Rwa) v Simba (Tan)
1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)
Lydia Academic (Bdi) v Atletico Semu (EqG)
3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0)
Mangasport (Gab) v St George (Eth)
0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)
Red Arrows (Zam) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Renaissance (Chd) v Sahel (Ngr)
2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v Unisport Bafang (Cam)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Union Douala (Cam) v Kallon (SLe)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)

ADR Mansaba (GuB) v Invincible Eleven (Lbr) – Mansaba withdrew; Invincible Eleven went through

Nania (Gha) v Sequence (Gui) – Nania withdrew; Sequence went through

Byes to next round
Al Ahli Shendi (Sud), Amal Atbara (Sud), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Club Africain (Tun), CO Bamako (Mli), COD Meknes (Mor), CS Sfaxien (Tun), ENPPI (Egy), ES Setif (Alg), Heartland (Nga), InterClube (Ang), Real Bamako (Mli), St Eloi Lupopo (DRC), Tshinkunku (DRC), Warri Wolves (Nga), Wydad Casablanca (Mor)

MOROCCO

MOROCCO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FUS	22	12	8	2	24	10	44
Moghreb	21	11	8	2	23	6	41
Raja	21	10	8	3	21	12	38
Wydad C	21	8	9	4	21	13	33
Maghreb	20	7	8	5	24	17	29
Difaa	21	8	5	8	18	17	29
Chabab	22	7	7	8	26	17	28
FAR	22	6	10	6	20	19	28
KAC	22	5	12	5	22	25	27
CODM	20	7	4	9	12	15	25
Olympique S	21	6	7	8	21	29	25
Hassania	22	6	7	9	15	23	25
Olympique K	22	5	7	10	19	26	22
Wydad F	22	5	7	10	18	30	22
Ittihad	21	5	6	10	8	19	21
JSM	22	4	5	13	13	27	17

Standings on Mar 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

NIGERIA

NIGERIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enugu	16	8	5	3	19	9	29
Enyimba	16	9	2	5	17	9	29
Kano	16	7	5	4	19	10	26
Gombe	16	7	4	5	22	17	25
Wikki	15	8	1	6	13	13	25
ABS	16	6	4	6	18	15	22
Kwara	15	6	4	5	15	13	22
Heartland	15	6	4	5	16	15	22
Tornadoes	15	6	4	5	15	16	22
S'shine Stars	13	6	3	4	16	10	21
Warri	14	5	6	3	13	10	21
Akwa	15	6	3	6	14	12	21
Dolphins	14	6	2	6	14	15	20
Kaduna	16	6	1	9	14	20	19
Sharks	16	5	3	8	15	22	18
Lobi	15	5	2	8	13	15	17
Shoot'g Stars	16	4	5	7	9	16	17
Ocean Boys	15	4	5	6	11	19	17
Rising Stars	16	3	6	7	6	12	15
Jigawa	16	4	3	9	10	21	15

Standings on Mar 27
38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mamelodi S	21	11	8	2	37	15	41
Orlando P'tes	21	11	4	6	25	19	37
Moroka Sw's	21	10	7	4	31	26	37
Kaizer Chiefs	20	10	6	4	25	15	36
Free State	21	10	5	6	26	19	35
SuperSport	21	9	7	5	28	17	34
Ajax Cape Tn	20	9	4	7	26	28	31
Bloemfontein	21	8	5	8	22	21	29
AmaZulu	20	7	6	7	18	14	27
Wits Univ	21	6	8	7	25	27	26
Platinum Stars	21	6	5	10	24	27	23
Golden Arrows	21	7	2	12	29	35	23
Maritzburg	21	5	8	8	19	29	23
Santos	21	5	4	12	25	35	19
Black L'pards	21	4	5	12	22	41	17
Jomo Cosmos	20	1	10	9	15	29	13

Standings on Mar 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

TUNISIA

TUNISIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bizertin	11	9	2	0	25	7	29
Esperance	11	9	1	1	22	4	28
Marsa	11	7	4	0	18	7	25
Etoile Sahel	11	5	3	3	17	10	18
CS Sfaxien	11	4	5	2	15	11	17
Club Africain	10	4	4	2	13	7	16
EGS Gafsa	11	4	4	3	12	14	16
Kairouan	12	3	5	4	11	14	14
Stade Tunisien	12	3	4	5	10	15	13
Beni-Khalled	12	3	2	7	11	16	11
Monastir	12	2	5	5	8	15	11
E Zarzis	12	2	4	6	13	26	10
Gabes	11	1	6	4	9	15	9
Hammam-S'se	12	1	6	5	9	15	9
Olympique	11	1	5	5	12	18	8
Hammam-Lif	12	2	2	8	10	21	8

Standings on Mar 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

On top...Mariners defender Joshua Rose (right)

AUSTRALIA

Mariners are top

Central Coast Mariners claimed the first-ever silverware, topping the regular season table. The club, who now qualify for next year's AFC Champions League, will face Brisbane Roar for a place in the Grand Final.

A-League regular season games attracted an average attendance of 10,490 – the best since it was launched in 2005.

CHINA

Losing start

Ex-France and Chelsea striker Nicolas Anelka scored on his league debut for Shanghai Shenhua, but could not prevent his new club from losing 3-2 to Beijing Guoan.

HONG KONG

Gunners friendly

Arsenal will play in Hong Kong for the first time in 17 years during their pre-season tour of Asia. The Premier League side will play Hong Kong champions Kitchee at the Hong Kong Stadium on July 29, two days after playing Manchester City in Beijing's Olympic Stadium.

IRAN

Spot on

Esteghlal won the Hazfi Cup, beating Shahin Bushehr on penalties and securing a place in the 2013 AFC Champions League.

JAPAN

Kashiwa too good

Current J.League champions Kashiwa Reysol beat cup

CLUB FOOTBALL

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 6: Al Rayyan (Qat) 0 Esteghlal (Irn) 1.
Mar 7: Nasaf (Uzb) 2 Al Jazira (UAE) 4.
Mar 20: Al Jazira 3 Al Rayyan 2; Esteghlal 0 Nasaf 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Jazira	2	2	0	0	7	4	6
Esteghlal	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Nasaf	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Al Rayyan	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Group B

Mar 6: Al Ittihad (Sau) 4 Pakhtakor (Uzb) 0; Bani Yas (UAE) 2 Al Arabi (Qat) 0.
Mar 20: Al Arabi 1 Al Ittihad 3; Pakhtakor 1 Bani Yas 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
Bani Yas	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Pakhtakor	2	0	1	1	1	5	1
Al Arabi	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group C

Mar 7: Lekhwiya (Qat) 1 Al Ahli (Sau) 0; Sepahan (Irn) 1 Al Nasr (UAE) 0.
Mar 21: Al Ahli 1 Sepahan 1; Al Nasr 2 Lekhwiya 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sepahan	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Al Nasr	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Lekhwiya	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Al Ahli	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Group D

Mar 7: Al Hilal (Sau) 1 Persepolis (Irn) 1; Al Shabab (UAE) 0 Al Gharafa (Qat) 0.
Mar 21: Al Gharafa 3 Al Hilal 3; Persepolis 6 Al Shabab 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Persepolis	2	1	1	0	7	2	4
Al Hilal	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Al Gharafa	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Al Shabab	2	0	1	1	1	6	1

Group E

Mar 6: Bunyodkor (Uzb) 1 Adelaide United (Aus) 2; Gamba Osaka (Jap) 0 Pohang Steelers (SKo) 3.
Mar 20: Adelaide United 2 Gamba Osaka 0; Pohang Steelers 0 Bunyodkor 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Adelaide	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Bunyodkor	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Pohang	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Gamba	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group F

Mar 6: Brisbane Roar (Aus) 0 Tokyo (Jap) 2; Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) 2 Beijing Guoan (Chn) 1.
Mar 20: Beijing Guoan 1 Brisbane Roar 1; Tokyo 2 Ulsan Hyundai 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tokyo	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Ulsan	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Beijing	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Brisbane	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group G

Mar 7: Nagoya Grampus (Jap) 2 Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (SKo) 2; Tianjin Teda (Chn) 0 Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 0.
Mar 21: Central Coast Mariners 1 Nagoya Grampus 1; Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma 1 Tianjin Teda 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nagoya	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Seongnam	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Central Coast	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Tianjin	2	0	2	0	1	1	2

Group H

Mar 7: Buriram United (Tha) 3 Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 2; Jeonbuk Motors (SKo) 1 Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) 5.
Mar 21: Guangzhou Evergrande 1 Buriram United 2; Kashiwa Reysol 5 Jeonbuk Motors 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buriram	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
Kashiwa	2	1	0	1	7	4	3
Guangzhou	2	1	0	1	6	3	3
Jeonbuk	2	0	0	2	2	10	0

Remaining matchdays
Apr 3/4, Apr 17/18, May 1/2, May 15/16

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AFC CUP

Group A

Mar 6: Al Faisaly (Jor) 1 Al Ittihad (Syr) 1; Al Qadsia (Kuw) 2 Al Suwaiq (Oma) 0.
Mar 20: Al Ittihad 1 Al Qadsia 0; Al Suwaiq 0 Al Faisaly 0.

AFC CUP – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Al Qadsia	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Al Faisaly	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Al Suwaiq	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Group B

Mar 6: East Bengal (Ind) 0 Al Orouba (Yem) 1; Arbil (Irq) 1 Kazma (Kuw) 1.
Mar 20: Al Orouba 2 Arbil 2; Kazma 3 East Bengal 0.

AFC CUP – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kazma	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Al Orouba	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Arbil	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
East Bengal	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Group C

Mar 7: Al Ahed (Leb) 5 VB Addu (Mdv) 3; Kuwait SC (Kuw) 1 Al Ettifaq (Sau) 5.
Mar 21: Al Ettifaq 0 Al Ahed 0; VB Addu 2 Kuwait SC 2.

AFC CUP – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ettifaq	2	1	1	0	5	1	4
Al Ahed	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
VB Addu	2	0	1	1	5	7	1
Kuwait SC	2	0	1	1	3	7	1

Group D

Mar 7: Neftchi (Uzb) 2 Al Wehdat (Jor) 1; Al Arouba (Oma) 1 Salgaocar (Ind) 0.
Mar 21: Salgaocar 2 Neftchi 2; Al Wehdat 2 Al Arouba 1.

AFC CUP – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Neftchi	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Al Wehdat	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Al Arouba	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Salgaocar	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group E

Mar 6: Al Tilal (Yem) 1 Safa (Leb) 2.
Mar 7: Al Shorta (Syr) 3 Al Zawra'a (Irq) 2.
Mar 20: Al Zawra'a 5 Al Tilal 0; Safa 0 Al Shorta 2.

AFC CUP – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shorta	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Al Zawra'a	2	1	0	1	7	3	3
Safa	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Al Tilal	2	0	0	2	1	7	0

Group F

Mar 6: Song Lam Nghe An (Vie) 0 Terengganu (Mly) 1; Kitchee (HK) 3 Tampines Rovers (Sin) 1.
Mar 20: Terengganu 0 Kitchee 2; Tampines Rovers 0 Song Lam Nghe An 0.

AFC CUP – GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kitchee	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Terengganu	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Song Lam	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Tampines	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group G

Mar 7: Yangon United (Mym) 1 Chonburi (Tha) 1; Home United (Sin) 3 Citizen (HK) 1.
Mar 21: Chonburi 1 Home United 0; Citizen 2 Yangon United 1.

AFC CUP – GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chonburi	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Home	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Citizen	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Yangon	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group H

Mar 7: Arema (Ins) 1 Ayeyawady United (Mym) 1; Kelantan (Mly) 0 Navibank Saigon (Vie) 0.
Mar 21: Ayeyawady United 3 Kelantan 1; Navibank Saigon 3 Arema 1.

AFC CUP – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ayeyawady	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Navibank	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Arema	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Kelantan	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Remaining matchdays
Apr 3/4, Apr 10/11, Apr 24/25, May 8/9

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Regular season

Mar 1: Adelaide 0 Perth 2.
Mar 2: Brisbane 1 Melbourne Heart 1.
Mar 3: Melbourne Victory 1 Newcastle 3; Central Coast 1 Sydney 1.
Mar 4: Wellington 2 Gold Coast 0.
Mar 9: Newcastle 1 Gold Coast 1.
Mar 10: Melbourne Heart 1 Wellington 1; Sydney 1 Melbourne Victory 0.
Mar 11: Brisbane 1 Adelaide 1; Perth 1 Central Coast 0.
Mar 16: Melbourne Victory 3 Wellington 0.
Mar 17: Central Coast 1 Adelaide 0; Newcastle 1 Brisbane 2; Melbourne Heart 2 Sydney 2.
Mar 18: Gold Coast 3 Perth 0.
Mar 23: Adelaide 1 Melbourne Heart 1.
Mar 24: Perth 4 Melbourne Victory 2.
Mar 25: Wellington 1 Central Coast 2; Sydney 3 Newcastle 2; Gold Coast 1 Brisbane 2.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Central Coast	27	15	6	6	40	24	51
Brisbane	27	14	7	6	50	28	49
Perth	27	13	4	10	40	35	43
Wellington	27	12	4	11	34	32	40
Sydney	27	10	8	9	37	42	38
Melbourne H	27	9	10	8	35	34	37
Newcastle	27	10	5	12	38	41	35
Melbourne V	27	6	11	10	35	43	29
Adelaide	27	5	10	12	26	44	25
Gold Coast*	27	4	9	14	30	42	21

Top 6 enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league (*but Gold Coast have been expelled after contravening FA rules)

CHINA

CHINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guangzhou RF	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Guangzhou E	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Liaoning	3	1	2	0	7	5	5
Guizhou	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Jiangsu	3	1	2	0	4	1	5
Qingdao	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Changchun	2	1	1	0	5	4	4
Dalian Shide	3	1	1	1	6	6	4
Hangzhou	3	1	1	1	1	3	4
Shanghai S'xin	3	1	1	1	5	2	4
Shanghai S'ua	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Tianjin	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Beijing	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Dalian Aerbin	3	0	2	1	6	7	2
Shandong	2	0	1	1	4	5	1
Henan	3	0	0	3	1	10	0

Standings on Mar 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

HONG KONG

HONG KONG	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kitchee	14	10	2	2	34	16	32
Pegasus	13	10	1	2	39	19	31
South China	13	8	3	2	33	10	27
Citizen	14	5	6	3	25	23	21
BC Rangers	13	5	4	4	25	22	19
Sun Hei	14	5	3	6	23	19	18
Tuen Mun	13	3	6	4	18	17	15
Wofoo Tai Po	13	4	2	7	17	29	14
HK Sapling	13	0	4	9	9	43	4
Sham Shui Po	14	0	3	11	6	31	3

Standings on Mar 27
18-round season (9x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

holders Tokyo 2-1 in the Super Cup, with goals from Jorge Wagner and Leandro Domingues.

KUWAIT

Clean-sheet record

Omar Al Soma scored the only goal of the game as Al Qadsia beat Kazma 1-0 in the Kuwait Prince Cup Final.

Qadsia's goalkeeper Nawaf Al Khaldi set a new national record by going 1,454 minutes without conceding a goal.

MYANMAR

Debut victory

Ayeyawady United recorded a first-ever win for a Myanmar club in the AFC Cup when they beat Malaysian league champions Kelantan 3-1.

Winner...Al Soma (second right)

QATAR

Successful defence

Lekhwiya retained their league title with a 1-1 draw against Al Arabi.

THAILAND

Buriram beaten

Chonburi beat Buriram United 4-3 on penalties following a 2-2 draw in the Kor Royal Cup.

IRAN

IRAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sepahan	28	16	7	5	45	22	55
Teraktor Sazi	28	15	7	6	48	31	52
Esteghlal	27	14	7	6	45	31	49
Naft	28	12	8	8	34	32	44
Saba	27	11	9	7	34	31	42
Zob Ahan	28	9	13	6	26	28	40
Foolad	28	10	9	9	32	27	39
Persepolis	28	9	11	8	41	37	38
Sanat	28	10	7	11	40	47	37
Saipa	28	8	10	10	39	30	34
Malavan	27	8	10	9	26	23	34
Damash	28	8	9	11	27	35	33
Mes Kerman	28	8	8	12	25	33	32
Fajr	27	8	7	12	28	37	31
Rah Ahan	28	5	14	9	32	37	29
Shahin	27	5	13	9	23	30	28
Shahrdari	27	5	12	10	28	36	27
Mes S'shme	28	4	7	17	19	45	19

Standings on Mar 27

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

JAPAN

Mar 10: Sagan 0 Cerezo 0; Sanfrecce 1 Urawa 0; Gamba 2 Vissel 3; Nagoya 1 Shimizu 0; Vegalta 1 Kashima 0; Consadole 0 Jubilo 0; Kawasaki 1 Albirex 0; Omiya 0 Tokyo 1.
Mar 11: Kashiwa 3 Yokohama 3.
Mar 17: Cerezo 2 Gamba 1; Albirex 1 Omiya 2; Yokohama 0 Vegalta 2; Urawa 1 Kashiwa 0; Kashima 0 Kawasaki 1; Shimizu 2 Sanfrecce 1; Vissel 2 Consadole 1; Jubilo 2 Sagan 1; Tokyo 3 Nagoya 2.
Mar 24: Vegalta 4 Omiya 1; Sanfrecce 2 Kashima 0; Kawasaki 0 Cerezo 1; Vissel 0 Tokyo 2; Sagan 1 Yokohama 0; Consadole 1 Urawa 2; Kashiwa 2 Shimizu 1.
Mar 25: Nagoya 2 Albirex 1; Gamba 1 Jubilo 2.

JAPAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vegalta	3	3	0	0	7	1	9
Tokyo	3	3	0	0	6	2	9
Jubilo	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Cerezo	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Sanfrecce	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Nagoya	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Urawa	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Kawasaki	3	2	0	1	2	1	6
Vissel	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Kashiwa	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Sagan	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Shimizu	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Omiya	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Consadole	3	0	1	2	2	4	1
Yokohama	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Gamba	3	0	0	3	4	7	0
Albirex	3	0	0	3	2	5	0
Kashima	3	0	0	3	0	4	0

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

SAUDI ARABIA

SAUDI ARABIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shabab	23	18	5	0	46	15	59
Al Ahli	23	18	4	1	54	19	58
Al Hilal	23	16	5	2	48	19	53
Al Ittifaq	22	12	6	4	35	20	42
Al Fateh	22	10	6	6	36	33	36
Al Ittihad	23	9	5	9	47	34	32
Al Nasr	23	8	4	11	31	34	28
Najran	23	6	9	8	32	45	27
Al Faisaly	23	5	8	10	31	38	23
Al Raed	22	6	4	12	23	32	22
Hajer	23	5	5	13	21	44	20
Al Taawon	23	4	6	13	28	45	18
Al Qadisiya	23	4	4	15	29	46	16
Al Ansar	22	2	1	19	16	53	7

Standings on Mar 27

26-round season (13x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SOUTH KOREA

Regular season

Mar 3: Pohang 0 Ulsan 1; Jeonbuk 3 Seongnam 2.
Mar 4: Suwon 1 Busan 0; Sangju 0 Gwangju 1; Daegu 1 Seoul 1; Jeju 3 Incheon 1; Chunnam 0 Gangwon 0; Gyeongnam 3 Daejeon 0.
Mar 10: Seoul 2 Chunnam 0; Gangwon 2 Daegu 0; Busan 1 Jeju 1.
Mar 11: Incheon 0 Suwon 2; Seongnam 1 Sangju 1; Daejeon 0 Jeonbuk 1; Gwangju 1 Pohang 1; Ulsan 2 Gyeongnam 1.
Mar 16: Ulsan 3 Seongnam 0.
Mar 17: Jeonbuk 1 Chunnam 1; Suwon 3 Gangwon 0; Gyeongnam 2 Sangju 3; Pohang 2 Busan 2.
Mar 18: Daegu 1 Incheon 0; Seoul 2 Daejeon 0; Gwangju 3 Jeju 2.
Mar 24: Busan 1 Gwangju 2; Chunnam 3 Gyeongnam 1; Jeju 2 Suwon 1; Incheon 2 Daejeon 1.
Mar 25: Gangwon 1 Seongnam 2; Sangju 1 Pohang 2; Seoul 2 Jeonbuk 1; Daegu 1 Ulsan 0.

SOUTH KOREA – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seoul	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Gwangju	4	3	1	0	7	4	10
Suwon	4	3	0	1	7	2	9
Ulsan	4	3	0	1	6	2	9
Jeju	4	2	1	1	8	6	7
Jeonbuk	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Daegu	4	2	1	1	3	3	7
Pohang	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Chunnam	4	1	2	1	4	4	5
Sangju	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Gangwon	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Seongnam	4	1	1	2	5	8	4
Gyeongnam	4	1	0	3	7	8	3
Incheon	4	1	0	3	3	7	3
Busan	4	0	2	2	4	6	2
Daejeon	4	0	0	4	1	8	0

30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 2 will go down)

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 2: Tefana (Tah) 2 Mont-Dore (NC) 0.
Mar 4: Ba (Fij) 3 Waitakere United (NZ) 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tefana	5	3	1	1	10	12	10
Waitakere	5	3	0	2	17	6	9
Ba	5	3	0	2	7	11	9
Mont-Dore	5	0	1	4	2	7	1

Group B

Mar 3: Hekari United (PNG) 1 Auckland City (NZ) 1; Koloale (Sol) 1 Amicale (Van) 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland (Q)	5	4	1	0	17	7	13
Hekari	5	2	2	1	7	5	8
Amicale	5	1	1	3	5	7	4
Koloale	5	1	0	4	6	16	3

***Remaining matchday** Mar 31*
Group winners qualify for Final

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland	13	11	2	0	42	10	35
Canterbury	13	9	1	3	37	11	28
Waitakere	13	8	0	5	38	16	24
T Wellington	13	7	2	4	30	17	23
Hawkes Bay	13	6	1	6	27	32	19
Otago	14	3	2	9	15	37	11
Waikato	14	2	3	9	17	39	9
YoungHeart	13	0	3	10	11	55	3

Standings on Mar 27

14-round regular season (7x2); top 4 will enter championship play-offs

KEY TO TABLES

(C) = champions (R) = relegated (Q) = qualified

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

May 1, 2 and 3
Libertadores Cup round of 16, 1st leg
May 5
Bundesliga season finishes
May 8, 9 and 10
Libertadores Cup round of 16, 2nd leg
May 12
La Liga season finishes
May 13
Serie A and Premier League seasons finish
May 15
AFC Champions League last group games
May 15, 16 and 17
Libertadores Cup quarter-finals 1st leg
May 19
UEFA Champions League Final
May 20
Ligue 1 season finishes
May 22, 23 and 24
Libertadores Cup quarter-finals 2nd leg

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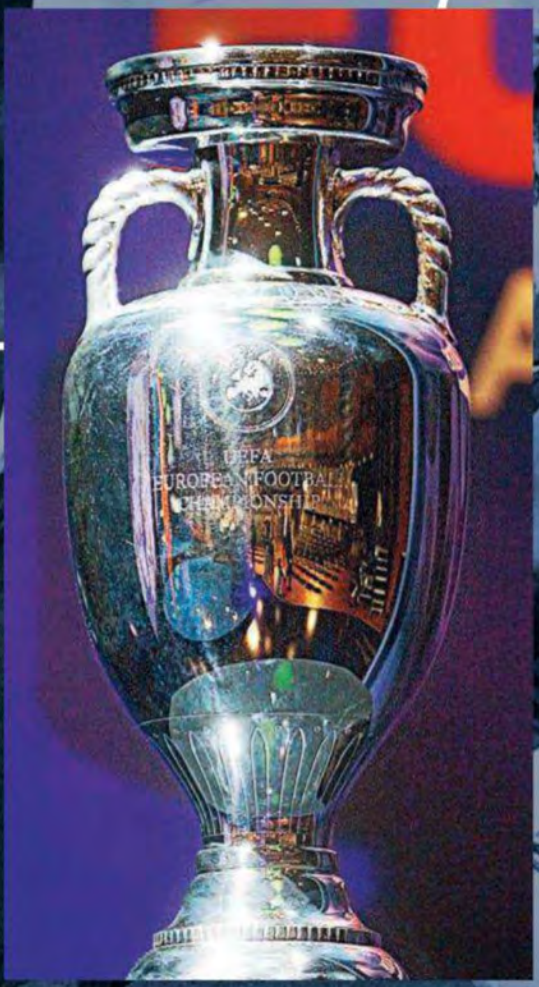

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The European Championship has come a long way from humble beginnings in 1960, when a number of senior UEFA members, including England and Germany, declined to take part in the first European Nations Cup.

The 2012 finals in Poland and Ukraine this summer will be the last 16-team tournament before UEFA expands the operation to 24 countries in France in 2016.

I'm not sure what Henri Delaunay would make of it all. Over the years, the trophy bearing his name has been won by a number of wonderful teams. We pay tribute to them here in this booklet, presented free with the May 2012 edition of *World Soccer*.

Gavin Hamilton

IPC INSPIRE

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8	1968	Italy	Italy
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12	1976	Yugoslavia	Czechoslovakia
14	1980	Italy	West Germany
18	1984	France	France
22	1988	West Germany	Holland
26	1992	Sweden	Denmark
30	1996	England	Germany
34	2000	Belgium/Holland	France
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44	2008	Austria/Switzerland	Spain
50		Brian Glanville's all-time Euro XI	

1960 FRANCE

Soviets claim first title

The first European Nations Cup, as it was originally known, was by no means a resounding success. Only 17 countries entered, with England, Italy and West Germany being among the absentees.

Spain were the early favourites and they thrashed Poland 7-2 on aggregate in the qualifying round, with two goals apiece from Luis Suarez and Alfredo Di Stefano. They were then drawn against the USSR in the quarter-finals, which were due to be played over home-and-away legs, but Spain's dictatorial leader, General Franco, barred the Soviets from entering the country. The tie was therefore awarded to the Soviet Union by default and they travelled to France for the finals tournament.

Stopped...Czechoslovakia goalkeeper Viliam Schrojf saves from Michel Stievenard of France in the third-place play-off

Original idea

France was an appropriate host of the first finals as it was a Frenchman, Henri Delaunay, who had originally proposed the idea of a European Championship to FIFA, back in 1927. However, the world governing body preferred to pursue its plan for a World Cup and Delaunay, who was UEFA's first general secretary, died in 1955 before he could see his idea come to fruition.

France, who had beaten Austria 9-4 on aggregate in the quarter-finals, met Yugoslavia in the semis without Just Fontaine, top scorer at the 1958 World Cup, and playmaker Raymond Kopa, and led 4-2 with 15 minutes to play. But Yugoslavia scored three times in an amazing last quarter of an hour to reach the Final.

In the other semi, the USSR, led by legendary goalkeeper Lev Yashin, beat Czechoslovakia 3-0 in Marseille.

The Final, played at the Parc des Princes, was a tight affair, with Yashin in outstanding form. The match went to extra time and Viktor Ponedelnik snatched the winner late in the game.

Victors...Ponedelnik (left) and Yashin

QUARTER-FINALS
(two legs, home and away)

USSR - Spain w/o (Spain withdrew)
Romania - Czechoslovakia 0-5 (0-2, 0-3)
France - Austria 9-4 (5-2, 4-2)
Portugal - Yugoslavia 3-6 (2-1, 1-5)

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in France)

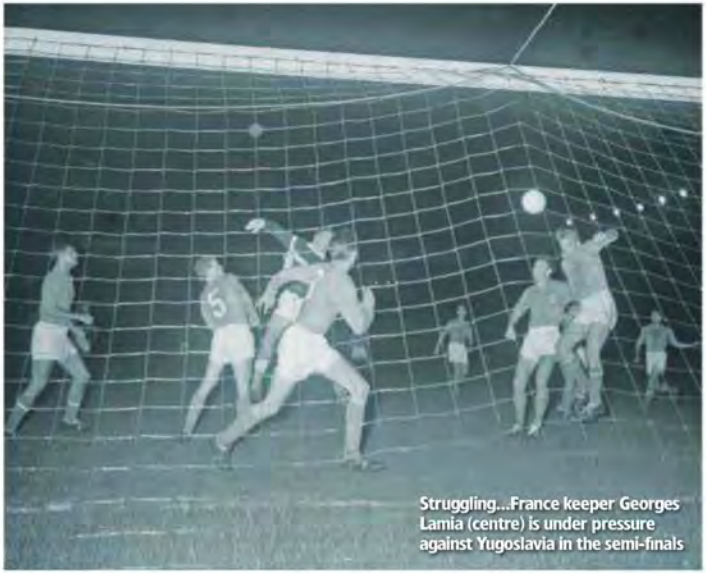
SEMI-FINALS
USSR - Czechoslovakia 3-0
Yugoslavia - France 5-4

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Czechoslovakia - France 2-0

POLITICAL FOOTBALL

General Franco refused to let Spain compete against the USSR in the quarter-finals due to the Soviet Union's support of the Second Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War.

Spain's withdrawal from the competition therefore left three communist countries in the finals tournament, along with hosts France.


Struggling...France keeper Georges Lamia (centre) is under pressure against Yugoslavia in the semi-finals

FINAL
July 10 - Paris
USSR 2
(Metreveli 49, Ponedelnik 114)
Yugoslavia 1
(Galic 41)
aet. Ref: Ellis (Eng)
Att: 17,966

CROWD PLEASERS

There may have been less than 18,000 in the Parc des Princes to see the USSR win the first Final, but when they set out on the road to Paris - beating Hungary 3-1 in 1958 in the home leg of their first-round game - they were watched by 100,572 people at the Lenin Stadium in Moscow.

REF IS A KNOCKOUT

English referee Arthur Ellis, who took charge of the Nations Cup Final at the Parc des Princes, also officiated in the first European Cup Final, at the same venue, in 1956.

After retiring from football, Ellis later found fame as a referee on the TV gameshow *It's a Knockout*.

Threatening...USSR on the attack in the Final

1960 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

1964 Spain

Spanish triumph on home soil

Four years on from their refusal to play the USSR on political grounds, Spain welcomed the holders...and then beat them in the Final.

Some 29 countries entered the competition, including England – who made a swift exit in Alf Ramsey's first competitive encounter, beaten 6-3 on aggregate by France in the first round.

Under coach Jose Villalonga, Spain were rebuilding, using players from provincial sides - including Valencia's Vicente Guillot, who scored a hat-trick in the first-round win against Romania.

Spain then drew 1-1 with Northern Ireland in Bilbao before winning 1-0 in Belfast with a goal from Francisco Gento. Next up were the Republic of Ireland, who were dismissed 7-1 on aggregate on the way to the semi-finals on home soil.

Early fallers in the tournament included Czechoslovakia, who were beaten by an athletic East Germany side, and Holland, light years away from the "total football" revolution but who still surprisingly lost to Luxembourg. Italy were beaten by the USSR in the second round.

Skipper...Spain's Ferran Olivella

In the quarter-finals, France went down to a Hungary side inspired by new hero Florian Albert, the Soviets beat Sweden and Denmark squeezed past Luxembourg.

Safe...France goalkeeper Pierre Bernard denies Hungary's Kalman Meszoly (left) in the quarter-finals

Politically sympathetic

After the political row four years previously, Spain had guaranteed UEFA there would be no problems this time, and the USSR played their semi-final in the more politically sympathetic city of Barcelona, where they beat Denmark with ease.

Spain needed extra time to get past Hungary in the other semi, with new Real Madrid starlet Amancio scoring the late winner.

Spain's key player was midfield general Luis Suarez, who was fresh from winning the European Cup that summer with Internazionale. He was arguably the best player in Europe at the time and provided the inspiration against an unimaginative Soviet side in the Final as Marcelino struck a second-half winner.

QUARTER-FINALS
(two legs, home and away)

Spain - Republic of Ireland 7-1 (5-1, 2-0)
France - Hungary 2-5 (1-3, 1-2)
Luxembourg - Denmark 5-5 (3-3, 2-2)
Denmark won third game 1-0
Sweden - USSR 2-4 (1-1, 1-3)

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in Spain)

SEMI-FINALS
Spain - Hungary 2-1 aet
USSR - Denmark 3-0

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Hungary - Denmark 3-1 aet

LONG WAIT

In the qualifying stage of the competition, Luxembourg won 2-1 in Rotterdam to eliminate Holland 3-2 on aggregate and only missed out on making it through to the finals in Spain after taking Denmark to a third, deciding game.

After their success against the Dutch in October 1963, Luxembourg would not win another Euro qualifying game until 1995.

Decider...Amancio (left) scores Spain's winner in extra time against Hungary

FINAL
June 21 - Madrid
Spain 2
(Pereda 6, Marcelino 84)
USSR 1
(Khusainov 8)
Ref: Holland (Eng)
Att: 79,115

WINNING COACH

The first coach to win the European Cup - and at 36 years and 184 days still the youngest - Jose Villalonga guided Real Madrid to victory over Stade de Reims in 1956 before taking charge of Spain in 1962. In addition to the 1964 Nations Cup, he also led his country at the 1966 World Cup, albeit with less success.

TALE OF TWO CITIES

Four days after scoring the winning goal for his country at the Nations Cup Final in the Santiago Bernabeu, Marcelino claimed another late winner, for his club side Real Zaragoza against Valencia, in the Camp Nou, in the Final of the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

Chance...USSR have a free-kick in the Final

1964 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

1968 ITALY

Azzurri grind out victory after replay

Sporting...Charlton (left) congratulates Yugoslavia skipper Mirsad Fazlagic

Only two of UEFA's 33 members, Iceland and Malta, declined to enter the 1968 competition. But while West Germany were there for the first time, they were one of two seeds who went out at the mini-league stage.

The West Germans could only draw their final game, against Albania, allowing Yugoslavia to go through to the quarter-finals, while Portugal finished second to Bulgaria. However, the other six seeds – holders Spain, England, USSR, Italy, Hungary and France – all progressed.

The British Home Nations championship doubled up as one of the groups and was won by England, who then played Spain in the pick of the quarter-finals. After Bobby Charlton scored at Wembley to give England a first-leg lead, Amancio levelled the aggregate score in Madrid before goals from Martin Peters and Norman Hunter sent England through to their first semi-final.

In the other quarter-finals, Yugoslavia thrashed France 5-1 in Belgrade to win 6-2 on aggregate, while Italy and the USSR recovered from first-leg away defeats, to Bulgaria and Hungary respectively, to progress.

Outstanding individuals

Italy were rebuilding after their humiliating exit at the hands of North Korea in the 1966 World Cup and new coach Ferruccio Valcareggi had some outstanding individuals, such as goalkeeper Dino Zoff, left-back Giacinto Facchetti, attacking midfielder Sandro Mazzola, and forwards Pietro Anastasi and Luigi Riva.

But the *Azzurri* needed a slice of luck to progress after their semi-final against the USSR in Naples ended goalless after extra time. The match was decided by the toss of a coin and the hosts headed for the Final.

Semi success...Yugoslavia's Dzajic (centre) beats England goalkeeper Gordon Banks

Italy's opponents in Rome were Yugoslavia, who had beaten England 1-0 in Florence as goalscorer Dragan Dzajic dazzled and Alan Mullery became the first Englishman to be sent off in an international.

In the Final, Dzajic opened the scoring for Yugoslavia, but Angelo Domenghini equalised from a controversial free-kick awarded by referee Gottfried Dienst.

With the scores level after 120 minutes, the two teams met again in a replay two days later. An early goal by Riva was furiously disputed by the Yugoslavs, but after Anastasi added a second, Italy's first (and so far only) European title was never in doubt.

QUARTER-FINALS
(two legs, home and away)

Bulgaria - Italy 3-4 (3-2, 0-2)
Hungary - USSR 2-3 (2-0, 0-3)
England - Spain 3-1 (1-0, 2-1)
France - Yugoslavia 2-6 (1-1, 1-5)

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in Italy)

SEMI-FINALS
Italy - USSR 0-0 aet
Italy won on toss of a coin
Yugoslavia - England 1-0

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
England - USSR 2-0

CONTROVERSIAL CALLS

Switzerland's Gottfried Dienst is one of only two men to have refereed both Euro and World Cup finals (the other is Sergio Gonella of Italy). However, not only was his officiating of the 1968 European Championship showpiece controversial, he was also the man in the middle who awarded England their hotly disputed third goal in the 1966 World Cup Final after consulting with his linesman, Tofik Bakhramov.

No doubt...Anastasi strikes in the replay

FINAL
June 8 - Rome
Italy 1
(Domenghini 80)
Yugoslavia 1
(Dzajic 39)
aet. Ref: Dienst (Swi)
Att: 69,000
Italy: Zoff; Burgnich, Guarneri, Castano, Facchetti; Ferrini, Lodetti, Juliano; Domenghini, Anastasi, Prati
Yugoslavia: Pantelic; Fazlagic, Paunovic, Holcer, Damjanovic; Trivic, Pavlovic, Acimovic; Petkovic, Musemic, Dzajic

FINAL REPLAY
June 10 – Rome
Italy 2
(Riva 11, Anastasi 32)
Yugoslavia 0
Ref: Ortiz de Mendibil (Spa)
Att: 32,886

NAME CHANGE

The 1968 tournament was the first to be known as the European Championship. There were also some changes in the competition's qualifying structure, with the two-legged, home-and-away knockout stage replaced by a group phase.

Hero...Italy captain Facchetti

1968 FINAL REPLAY: HOW THEY LINED UP

1972 Belgium

West Germany dominate from start to finish

Iceland were the only country among the 33-strong membership of UEFA who did not take part in a competition that, for a second time, took the form of a first round consisting of eight mini-leagues, with the group winners progressing to home-and-away quarter-finals.

West Germany proved to be the tournament's outstanding team. Under coach Helmut Schoen, their nucleus was provided by players from the country's top two club sides, Bayern Munich and Borussia Monchengladbach. They were an exciting, attack-minded team featuring revolutionary sweeper Franz Beckenbauer and playmaker Gunter Netzer, plus left-back Paul Breitner and striker Gerd Muller.

In vain...Hungary keeper Istvan Geczi tries to keep the USSR (in white) at bay

Down and out...West Germany's Sepp Maier denies Francis Lee of England

They finished four points clear of a promising Poland side in their group, then faced familiar foes England in the quarter-finals. The Germans avenged their defeat at Wembley in the 1966 World Cup Final with a 3-1 victory – their first at the stadium. Beckenbauer and Netzer were outstanding in providing the creative flair, while Uli Hoeness and Herbert Wimmer supplied attacking energy and Muller the finishing touch.

In the other quarter-finals, the USSR again beat Yugoslavia, Hungary squeezed past Romania after a play-off and Belgium knocked out holders Italy.

East and west

The semi-finals were split between east and west Europe. The USSR beat Hungary 1-0 in front of a crowd of just 3,000 in Brussels, while 60,000 saw hosts Belgium go down 2-1 to West Germany in Antwerp.

In the Final, at Brussels' Heysel Stadium, West Germany dominated and ran out 3-0 winners, with Muller finishing as top scorer with 11 goals in the qualifiers and finals.

QUARTER-FINALS
(two legs, home and away)

England - West Germany 1-3 (1-3, 0-0)
Italy - Belgium 1-2 (0-0, 1-2)
Hungary - Romania 3-3 (1-1, 2-2)
Hungary won third game 2-1
Yugoslavia - USSR 0-3 (0-0, 0-3)

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(in Belgium)

SEMI-FINALS
West Germany - Belgium 2-1
USSR - Hungary 1-0

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Belgium - Hungary 2-1

HOME DISADVANTAGE

At the request of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, this was the first tournament in which the annual British Home Nations championship was not used as a qualifying group.

But while the format may have been altered, the outcome remained the same, with England topping their group and the other three all failing to qualify, winning just seven games between them.

Expectant...the closing stages of the Final

FINAL
June 18 – Brussels
West Germany 3
(Muller 27, 58, Wimmer 52)
USSR 0
Ref: Marschall (Aut)
Att: 43,066

UNIQUE DOUBLE

Having later led West Germany to victory on home soil in 1974, Helmut Schoen is the only coach to have won both the World Cup and the European Championship. His managerial record also includes second place in the 1966 World Cup and 1976 European Championship, and third place in the 1970 World Cup. As a player he appeared 16 times for his country, between 1937 and 1941, scoring 17 goals.

SWEEPING THE BOARD

West Germany took the first three places in the 1972 European Player of the Year poll, with Franz Beckenbauer narrowly beating Gerd Muller and Gunter Netzer, who tied for second spot.

Fanfare...West Germany fans salute the champions

1972 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

1976 Yugoslavia

Panenka seals Czech win on penalties

The 1976 tournament was the most exciting of the first generation of the competition, with four outstanding teams: Czechoslovakia, Holland, West Germany and Yugoslavia.

In the group stage, Czechoslovakia lost 3-0 to England at Wembley but won a fog-delayed return in Bratislava 2-1 to finish a point ahead.

Yugoslavia, Spain, USSR, Belgium and West Germany also progressed to the quarter-final stage, while Wales were the surprise winners of their group, finishing ahead of Hungary and Austria.

The only other upset in the qualifiers was in Group 5, where Holland squeezed through on goal difference ahead of Italy and Poland.

In the two-leg quarter-finals, Czechoslovakia defeated the fancied USSR, while Holland, inspired by Johan Cruyff and Johan Neeskens, saw off neighbours Belgium. West Germany got the better of Spain, while Yugoslavia won a bad-tempered tie with Wales to claim a semi-final place - and also earn the hosting rights.

Czechoslovakia set the tone for the finals with a thrilling 3-1 win over Holland in extra time, with English referee Clive Thomas sending off Neeskens and Wim Van Hanegem

Brolly good...ref Thomas tries to protect Holland's Cruyff before the semi-final

Clash...Yugoslavia's Enver Hadziabdic is sent flying by John Mahoney of Wales

In the other semi, West Germany needed extra time to beat Yugoslavia as they recovered from 2-0 down to win 4-3, with new German hero Dieter Muller scoring a hat-trick.

In the Final, the Czechs led 2-1 with one minute remaining when Bernd Holzenbein equalised to send the match into extra time. With the scores still level after 120 minutes, penalties followed and Antonin Panenka scored the winner with an outrageous spot-kick.

After their loss to England early in the qualifying campaign, this was the new European champions' 21st game without defeat.

QUARTER-FINALS
(two legs, home and away)
Czechoslovakia - USSR 4-2 (2-0, 2-2)
Holland - Belgium 7-1 (5-0, 2-1)
Yugoslavia - Wales 3-1 (2-0, 1-1)
Spain - West Germany 1-3 (1-1, 0-2)

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in Yugoslavia)

SEMI-FINALS
Czechoslovakia - Holland 3-1 aet
West Germany - Yugoslavia 4-2 aet

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Holland - Yugoslavia 3-2 aet

BONHOF'S MEDAL HAUL

West Germany midfielder Rainer Bonhof is the only player with three European championship medals, and the only player to have won the trophy twice. But although he was part of the squad that triumphed in 1972 and 1980, his only Final appearance was when his side lost in 1976.

Cheeky chip... Panenka's penalty

FINAL
June 20 - Belgrade
Czechoslovakia 2
(Svehlik 8, Dobias 25)
West Germany 2
(Muller 28, Holzenbein 89)
aet. Ref: Gonella (Ita)
Att: 30,790
Czechoslovakia won 5-3 on penalties: Masny 1-0, Bonhof 1-1; Nehoda 2-1, Flohe 2-2; Ondrus 3-2, Bongartz 3-3; Jurkemik 4-3, Hoeness 4-3 (missed); Panenka 5-3

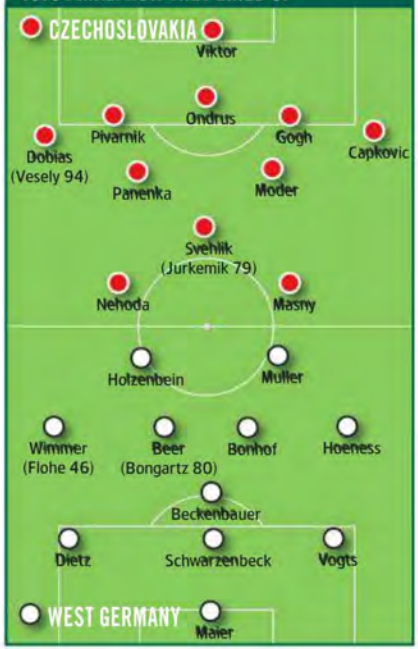
THE WINNING SPOT-KICK

Antonin Panenka became famous for his cheeky, chipped spot kick over the diving goalkeeper that won the 1976 tournament, but at the time the Czechoslovakia midfielder and his team-mates were unaware that penalties had to be taken. At the end of 120 minutes they headed back to the dressing room in the belief that a replay would be necessary.

Uli Hoeness missed the decisive penalty for West Germany in the Final. It was to be his last-ever international.

Kitted out...Czechoslovakia after swapping shirts

1976 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP



1980 Italy

Rummenigge inspires Germans to second title

Spot on...England's Ray Clemence saves a penalty from Dani of Spain

The growing popularity of the continental competition prompted UEFA to expand the 1980 finals to eight countries.

Hosts Italy were given a direct route to the finals, while the remaining 31 teams (Albania were absent) took part in a qualifying competition that featured three groups of five teams and four groups of four.

England and West Germany strolled through their groups but the six others were tight affairs, all of them with only one point in it. Belgium pipped Austria in Group 2, Spain edged out Yugoslavia in Group 3, Holland finished ahead of Poland in Group 4, Czechoslovakia topped Group 5 ahead of France, while Greece surprisingly finished top of Group 6 ahead of Hungary.

Italy became the first country to host the tournament twice and for the finals they were paired with England, Belgium and Spain, while old rivals West Germany and Holland headed up the other group, which included holders Czechoslovakia and newcomers Greece.

With the group winners going straight to the Final, the 12 group games produced a disappointing 22 goals between them.

After an opening draw against England, Belgium beat Spain 2-1 in their next match. England's hopes of reaching a first Final disappeared when they lost 1-0 to Italy, for whom Marco Tardelli scored the crucial goal 10 minutes from the end.

Belgium then held on for a goalless draw with Italy in their last game to reach their first major Final.

Meanwhile, West Germany had established themselves as the clear tournament favourites by topping their group with victories over Czechoslovakia – the 1-0 scoreline gaining revenge for defeat in the 1976 Final – and Holland.

Top scorer...Allofs in action against Czechoslovakia

A goalless draw with Greece was enough to top the group, while Holland and the Czechs drew 1-1 in their final group game.

Third-place play-off

The Final was played out in front of a less-than-capacity crowd of under 48,000 in Rome. It might well have been different had hosts Italy reached the Final. Instead, Italy had played the previous night in Naples in the third-place play-off against Czechoslovakia, who had edged out Holland on goal difference from second place in their group.

A disappointing match ended 1-1 but the Czechs once again proved their mastery of penalties by winning the resultant shoot-out 9-8.

Italy defender Fulvio Collovati missed the decisive kick when his shot was parried by Czech keeper Jaroslav Netolicka, although the Italians claimed Netolicka had dropped the ball over the line. Austrian referee Erich Linemayr disagreed, but the damage had been done and UEFA

Rear-guard action...West Germany defend in numbers against Holland

Late show...Hrubesch (far left) celebrates his winner against Belgium

vowed not to repeat the "losers' final" in future tournaments.

The player of the tournament was undoubtedly West Germany's Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. The Bayern Munich forward scored the winner in his country's opening game, against Czechoslovakia, and went on to confirm his growing reputation by supplying the corner from which Horst Hrubesch headed the late winner in the Final.

Hrubesch had opened the scoring for West Germany in the 10th minute of the game in Rome, only for Belgium to equalise with a penalty from Rene Vandereycken midway through the second half.

The spot-kick had been awarded for a trip on Franky Van der Elst by Uli Stielike, although television replays showed the foul to have been committed just outside the area. Belgium's coach Guy Thys claimed it had been a "moral penalty" and was just reward for the attacking ambition that his side had shown throughout the tournament.

Rummenigge would be voted European Footballer of the Year a few months later, while Hrubesch was hailed as the hero of the Final after emerging late on the international scene at the age of 29 after team-mate Klaus Fischer had broken a leg earlier in the year.

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in Italy)

GROUP 1

West Germany - Czechoslovakia 1-0
Holland - Greece 1-0
West Germany - Holland 3-2
Czechoslovakia - Greece 3-1
Czechoslovakia - Holland 1-1
West Germany - Greece 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
West Germany	3	2	1	0	4	2	5
Czechoslovakia	3	1	1	1	4	3	3
Holland	3	1	1	1	4	4	3
Greece	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

GROUP 2

Belgium - England 1-1
Spain - Italy 0-0
Spain - Belgium 1-2
Italy - England 1-0
Spain - England 1-2
Italy - Belgium 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium	3	1	2	0	3	2	4
Italy	3	1	2	0	1	0	4
England	3	1	1	1	3	3	3
Spain	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Czechoslovakia - Italy 1-1
Czechoslovakia won 9-8 on pens

Trouble...England fans

FINAL
June 22 - Rome
West Germany 2
(Hrubesch 10, 88)
Belgium 1
(Vandereycken 72pen)
Ref: Rainea (Rom)
Att: 47,864

GERMAN TREBLE

Fortuna Dusseldorf's Klaus Allofs was the top scorer in the finals tournament with three goals - all of them in the 3-2 win against Holland. This was the third successive time a West German had topped the finals' scoring charts, following on from Gerd Muller in 1972 and Dieter Muller in 1976.

HOOLIGANS ABROAD

The growing problem of hooliganism on the terraces made the headlines when riot police unleashed tear gas to quell unrest among supporters during England's opening draw with Belgium in Turin's Stadio Communale.

The disturbances caused the match to be held up for five minutes in the first half.

Champions...West Germany

1980 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

1984 France

Imperious Platini inspires hosts to victory

Unplayable...Platini (far left) scores against Belgium

Built around the sublime talent of midfielder Michel Platini, France were the outstanding international team of the early 1980s. They had come close to winning the 1982 World Cup, losing to West Germany in a semi-final penalty shoot-out, and were favourites to win the European title on home soil two years later.

For the first time UEFA's entire membership of 33 had entered the competition. France, as hosts, qualified automatically, while the remaining 32 countries were organised into seven qualifying groups.

Belgium were comfortable winners of their group, three points ahead of Switzerland, but the other groups all went to the wire. Portugal finished one point clear of the USSR, while a similar margin saw Yugoslavia, Denmark and Romania finish in front of Wales, England and Sweden respectively.

The two other groups were settled on goal difference. West Germany scraped a 2-1 win over Albania in their final game to edge out Northern Ireland, while Spain needed to beat Malta by 11 goals to be placed above Holland. Although they conceded an early goal in Seville, Spain recovered to score 12 – a result that forced UEFA to insist all last-round games took place simultaneously in the future.

Hard...West Germany and Hans-Peter Briegel struggled to get past Marcel Coras' Romania

The orchestrator

At the finals, France were in devastating form, with Platini the orchestrator of a brilliant midfield that also contained Luis Fernandez, Jean Tigana and Alain Giresse. Platini scored seven goals in France's three group games: the only goal in the 1-0 victory over Denmark, and then hat-tricks against Belgium (5-0) and Yugoslavia (3-2).

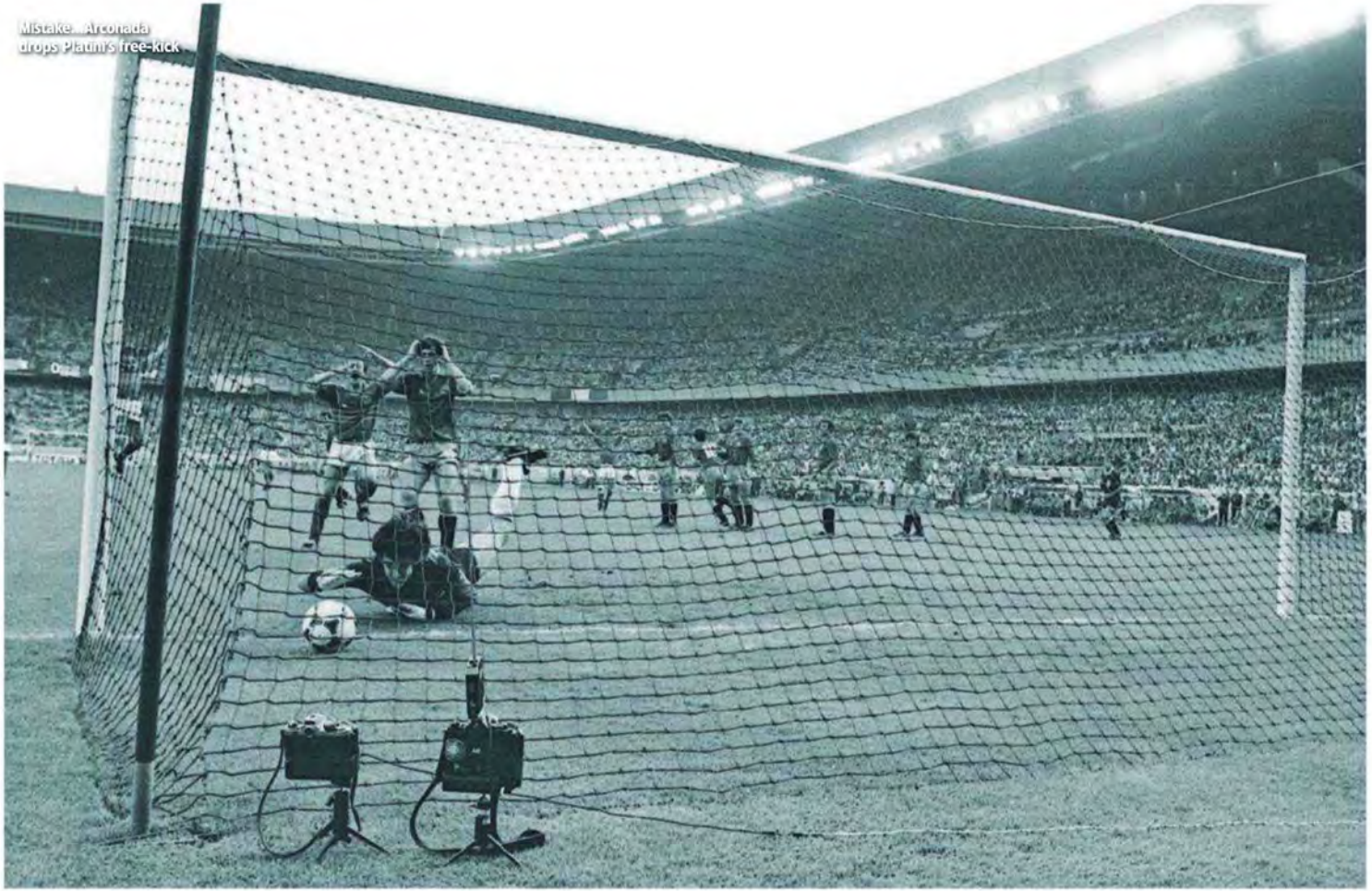
The Danes lost Allan Simonsen with a broken leg in the loss to France, but a 5-0 victory over Yugoslavia demonstrated that they were a rising force in the game and they finished second to qualify for the semi-finals.

The balance of power in the European game was shifting and this was exemplified by the failure of defending champions West Germany to make the last four. A disappointing German side drew their opening game with Portugal and then edged past Romania with a narrow 2-1 win.

They still needed a point from their game against Spain, who had only managed to draw their matches with Romania and Portugal. And after goalkeeper Toni Schumacher saved a penalty from Spain's Francisco Carrasco, it looked like West Germany would get the necessary point. But, in injury time, Spain launched one final attack. Juan Senor's cross from the right was left by Schumacher and his defenders, and Antonio Maceda headed home the winner.

The semi-final between France and Portugal proved to be a classic. Platini played an important part in the opening goal when he was fouled on the edge of the Portuguese penalty

Dramatic...Platini (no10) sees off Portugal in the semi-finals



Mistake... Arconada drops Platini's free-kick

area and Jean-Francois Domergue's free-kick was deflected by Joao Pinto into the net.

The French had a number of opportunities to extend their lead but failed to take them, and Portugal equalised through Rui Jordao midway through the second half. In extra time both goalkeepers were kept busy by a flurry of attacks. Jordao put Portugal ahead in the 97th minute but France hit back through Domergue, played in by Platini, in the 114th minute. Just as penalties were being contemplated, Tigana wriggled through the Portugal defence, went round keeper Manuel Bento and cut the ball back for Platini to score a dramatic winner.

In the other semi, there was more drama as Spain edged past Denmark on penalties following a 1-1 draw.

Decisive blow

In the Final at the Parc des Princes, in Paris, Spain's luck finally ran out. Injuries and suspensions deprived them of several key players and a slip by goalkeeper Luis Arconada on 56 minutes proved a decisive blow.

The Spain captain allowed a free-kick from Platini to slip through his grasp and over the line. France coped with the 84th-minute sending-off of Yvon Le Roux and added a second goal, through Bruno Bellone, in the final minute.

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in France)

GROUP 1

France - Denmark 1-0
Belgium - Yugoslavia 2-0
France - Belgium 5-0
Denmark - Yugoslavia 5-0
France - Yugoslavia 3-2
Denmark - Belgium 3-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	3	3	0	0	9	2	6
Denmark	3	2	0	1	8	3	4
Belgium	3	1	0	2	4	8	2
Yugoslavia	3	0	0	3	2	10	0

GROUP 2

West Germany - Portugal 0-0
Spain - Romania 1-1
West Germany - Romania 2-1
Portugal - Spain 1-1
West Germany - Spain 0-1
Portugal - Romania 1-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	1	2	0	3	2	4
Portugal	3	1	2	0	2	1	4
West Germany	3	1	1	1	2	2	3
Romania	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

SEMI-FINALS

France - Portugal 3-2
Spain - Denmark 1-1 aet
Spain won 5-4 on pens

Saved...Spain's Arconada thwarts a Denmark attack

FINAL
June 27 - Paris
France 2
(Platini 57, Bellone 90)
Spain 0
Ref: Christov (Cze)
Att: 47,000

PERFECT PLATINI

Michel Platini's nine goals in the finals are still a record. His two three-goal hauls, against Belgium and Yugoslavia, were both "perfect" hat-tricks, as he scored with right foot, left foot and his head.

Replaced...Derwall

OVER WHEN OUT

West Germany coach Jupp Derwall, who led his country to European success in 1980, was sacked shortly after the tournament and replaced by Franz Beckenbauer.

Victorious...France win on home soil

1984 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

1988 West Germany

Van Basten and Gullit lead Holland to glory

Success at international level eluded Holland until the World Cup runners-up of 1974 and 1978 finally landed a major prize across the border in West Germany.

Holland were coached by Rinus Michels, who had been in charge when they lost the 1974 World Cup Final to the Germans, and their triumph 14 years later was a testament to the Dutch approach to youth coaching and football intelligence.

For the third tournament running, the format was a qualifying section of mini-leagues, followed by an eight-team finals, with the group winners progressing to knockout semi-finals.

In the qualifying round, Italy, the USSR, England and Holland swept all before them in their respective groups. Spain, Denmark and the Republic of Ireland all went through after a tight scrap, while West Germany qualified automatically as hosts.

The only hitch in the qualifying process was in Holland's home match against Cyprus in October 1987. The

Danger...West Germany's Matthias Herget takes on Denmark

Dutch won 8-0 but the result was annulled by UEFA due to a firework being thrown at Cyprus goalkeeper Andreas Charitou. Holland won the re-arranged game 4-0 but arguments still raged years later as to whether details from the first match should be credited to players' international records. Striker John Bosman scored five of Holland's eight goals in the first match but only three in the replay.

Peaked too early

England arrived in West Germany for the finals with the best record of any of the qualifiers, scoring 19 goals and conceding just one. But it appeared they had peaked too early and they lost all three of their group games. It started with a 1-0 setback against Jack Charlton's Republic of Ireland and continued with a devastating defeat by Holland, for whom Marco Van Basten scored a hat-trick, and a 3-1 reverse against the USSR.

Milan striker Van Basten had been troubled by an ankle injury all season

Cracking...Ray Houghton (right) scored Ireland's winner against England

Beaten...Van Basten scores against England

and it took the words of friend and mentor Johan Cruyff to persuade him to join up with the squad. When Van Basten was substituted towards the end of the England game, he shook hands with coach Michels and that handshake came to symbolise the new-found unity of spirit which ultimately carried the Dutch to victory. However, defeat by the Soviets in their opening game meant Holland finished second in their group

West Germany topped the other group without appearing convincing – Italy were runners-up – and led Holland in their semi-final in Hamburg thanks to a Lothar Matthaus penalty

Close...Holland keeper Van Breukelen keeps out the Irish

Powerful...Gullit (left) demonstrates his ability in the air during the Final

after a foul on Jurgen Klinsmann. Holland hit back immediately, with Ronald Koeman thumping home a penalty of their own before Van Basten snatched a late winner.

The USSR continued their fine record in the championships with a 2-0 victory over Italy in the other semi-final.

Panache and flair

In the Final, played in Munich's Olympiastadion, Holland met a Soviet side missing the significant defensive presence of Oleg Kuznetsov through suspension. But even Kuznetsov would not have been able to control the panache and flair of Van Basten and skipper Ruud Gullit in the Dutch attack when they were in this mood.

Gullit scored the first goal, a powerful header from Van Basten's headed lay-off, and Van Basten added the second, volleying home from Arnold Muhren's cross to claim one of the greatest goals ever seen in any major international event.

The Soviets had a great chance to get themselves back in the match when Holland's goalkeeper Hans Van Breukelen carelessly conceded a penalty midway through the second half. However, the stopper redeemed himself by saving Igor Belanov's spot-kick and Holland were rarely troubled thereafter.

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in West Germany)

GROUP 1

West Germany - Italy 1-1
Denmark - Spain 2-3
West Germany - Denmark 2-0
Italy - Spain 1-0
West Germany - Spain 2-0
Italy - Denmark 2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
West Germany	3	2	1	0	5	1	5
Italy	3	2	1	0	4	1	5
Spain	3	1	0	2	3	5	2
Denmark	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

GROUP 2

England - Republic of Ireland 0-1
Holland - USSR 0-1
England - Holland 1-3
Republic of Ireland - USSR 1-1
England - USSR 1-3
Republic of Ireland - Holland 0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USSR	3	2	1	0	5	2	5
Holland	3	2	0	1	4	2	4
Rep of Ireland	3	1	1	1	2	2	3
England	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

SEMI-FINALS

West Germany - Holland 1-2
USSR - Italy 2-0

Going out...Italy's Gianluca Vialli in the semi-finals

FINAL
June 25 - Munich
Holland 2
(Gullit 33, Van Basten 54)
USSR 0
Ref: Vautrot (Fra)
Att: 62,770

MISSING OUT

France could only finish in third place, behind the USSR and East Germany, in their qualifying group - the only time since the tournament's 1980 revamp that the holders have not qualified for the finals.

DOUBLE DUTCH

This was the only year in which the UEFA European Championship and European Cup winners came from the same country.

A month after helping PSV Eindhoven to European glory - by beating Benfica 6-5 on penalties after a goalless draw in Stuttgart - Hans van Breukelen, Ronald Koeman, Berry Van Aerle and Gerald Vanenburg all started in the Euro Final for Holland.

Bright future...Holland

1988 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

1992 Sweden

Denmark come from nowhere to claim title

End...Gary Lineker is substituted against Sweden in his last appearance for England

The 1992 European Championship took place against a backdrop of huge political change sweeping across Europe, as the upheavals caused by the break-up of the former Soviet Bloc impacted on the European football landscape.

The biggest beneficiaries of the changes were Denmark, who were called in as last-minute replacements at the finals when Yugoslavia were barred on security grounds by UEFA following the country's descent into civil war.

Denmark, who had finished a point behind Yugoslavia in their qualifying group, were given just two weeks notice to prepare for the finals, with coach Richard Moller Nielsen famously putting on hold plans to refurbish his kitchen. His team ended up going all the way to the Final, where they beat Germany in one of the game's most unlikely cup triumphs.

The political changes had a major impact on the qualifying stages. The former East Germany disappeared from the map of Europe just as the event kicked off – although Thomas Doll, Matthias Sammer and Andreas Thom were later allowed to play for a united Germany at the finals.

Debut...Scotland manager Andy Roxburgh, with Richard Gough

End of the USSR

The USSR, which was in the throes of being broken, qualified ahead of Italy but went to the finals under the title of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Scotland qualified for their first European finals by finishing ahead of Switzerland and Romania, while England topped their group ahead of the Republic of Ireland.

Spain did not play their final match against Albania because of security concerns in Tirana. However, by then Spain were already 10 points behind group winners France after a hugely disappointing campaign. Meanwhile, Germany and Holland won their groups following home victories over Wales and Portugal respectively.

So the finals draw featured hosts Sweden, in the finals for the first time, Denmark, France and England in Group 1, with Holland, Germany, Scotland and the CIS in Group 2.

Sweden proved to be amicable hosts and they topped their group thanks to a wonderful Tomas Brolin goal that sealed victory against a disappointing England side in their final game.

Denmark finished as group runners-up thanks to a 2-1 win over an underachieving France side coached by their old maestro Michel Platini, who would quit after the first-round exit and take up a role as president of the 1994 French World Cup organising committee.

Holland and Germany came through Group 2, although the Germans needed a last-minute goal

Home joy...Brolin's goal beats Denmark

Semi-final clash...Holland's Van Basten and Henrik Larsen (left) of Denmark

from Thomas Hassler to take a point from their opening game against the CIS. Holland topped the group after beating Germany 3-1 in the decisive final game. The Germans still progressed to the semi-finals, though, because Scotland beat the CIS in the other match.

Holland were the favourites to triumph in their semi-final in Gothenburg, but came up against a determined Denmark side who defied the Dutch attacks and held on for a 2-2 draw before triumphing in the penalty shoot-out. Four years on from his imperious goal in the 1988 Final, Marco Van Basten missed the crucial spot-kick for Holland.

Germany proved too strong for Sweden in the other semi in Stockholm, even though Brolin continued his fine tournament with a late consolation in a 3-2 defeat for the hosts.

The Final in Gothenburg was expected to be a formality for Germany, but Denmark had not read the script. Moller Nielsen had instilled an unshakeable confidence into his players, from Peter Schmeichel in goal, through to captain Lars Olsen, midfielders John Jensen and Kim Vilfort, and forward Brian Laudrup – and goals from Jensen and Vilfort produced one of the greatest shocks in the international game.

FINALS TOURNAMENT
(played in Sweden)

GROUP 1

Sweden - France 1-1
Denmark - England 0-0
France - England 0-0
Sweden - Denmark 1-0
Sweden - England 2-1
France - Denmark 1-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden	3	2	1	0	4	2	5
Denmark	3	1	1	1	2	2	3
France	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
England	3	0	2	1	1	2	2

GROUP 2

Holland - Scotland 1-0
Germany - CIS 1-1
Germany - Scotland 2-0
Holland - CIS 0-0
Scotland - CIS 3-0
Holland - Germany 3-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	2	1	0	4	1	5
Germany	3	1	1	1	4	4	3
Scotland	3	1	0	2	3	3	2
CIS	3	0	2	1	1	4	2

SEMI-FINALS

Sweden - Germany 2-3
Holland - Denmark 2-2 aet
Denmark won 5-4 on pens

EIGHT OUT OF EIGHT

France became the first team to claim a perfect record in a UEFA European Championship qualifying group, winning eight out of eight games.

FINAL
June 26 - Gothenburg
Denmark 2
(Jensen 18, Vilfort 78)
Germany 0
Ref: Galler (Swi)
Att: 37,000

Opener...Jensen

FOREIGN POLICY

Denmark's triumph came days after the country had voted in a referendum to stay out of the EU. As foreign minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen observed: "If you can't join them, beat them."

Shock...Denmark

1996 England

Germans strike gold in 16-team tournament

Not happy...Italy had a poor Euro 96

The collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the break-up of Czechoslovakia and the former Yugoslavia, meant a record 47 countries competed in the qualifiers for Euro 96, which were expanded to feature 16 teams.

At the finals, England were heavily backed by an enthusiastic Wembley crowd but felt the pressure in their opening game against Switzerland, and drew 1-1. They made amends in their next game, beating Scotland 2-0, with Scottish captain Gary McAllister missing a penalty and Paul Gascoigne scoring a memorable goal, flicking the ball over defender Colin Hendry before volleying home.

A draw between England and Holland in their final group game would have sent both sides through to the quarter-finals. Instead, England thrashed the Dutch 4-1 with a thrilling display as Holland squeezed through despite their defeat.

In Group B, France topped the group after seeing off old rivals Bulgaria in the decisive final game, winning 3-1. Bulgaria's Hristo Stoichkov and another star of the 1994 World Cup, Gheorghe Hagi of Romania, failed to repeat their success of two years previously. The Romanians lost all three of their group games, while the Bulgarians were edged out of second place by Spain.

Major upset

Group C provided a major upset, with 1994 World Cup runners-up Italy crashing out despite beating Russia in their opening game. Their attacking frailties were exposed in a shock defeat by the Czech Republic which left Italy needing to beat group leaders Germany and hoping that Russia took points off the Czech Republic.

The *Azzurri* dominated against 10 men for the whole match but could not score. When Russia took the lead against the Czechs with five minutes remaining, it looked like Italy would still make the quarter-finals. But Vladimir Smicer's last-minute goal sent the Czechs through instead.

In Group D, defending champions Denmark struggled, as did tournament first-timers Turkey. Instead, Croatia and Portugal impressed, both playing some sparkling football.

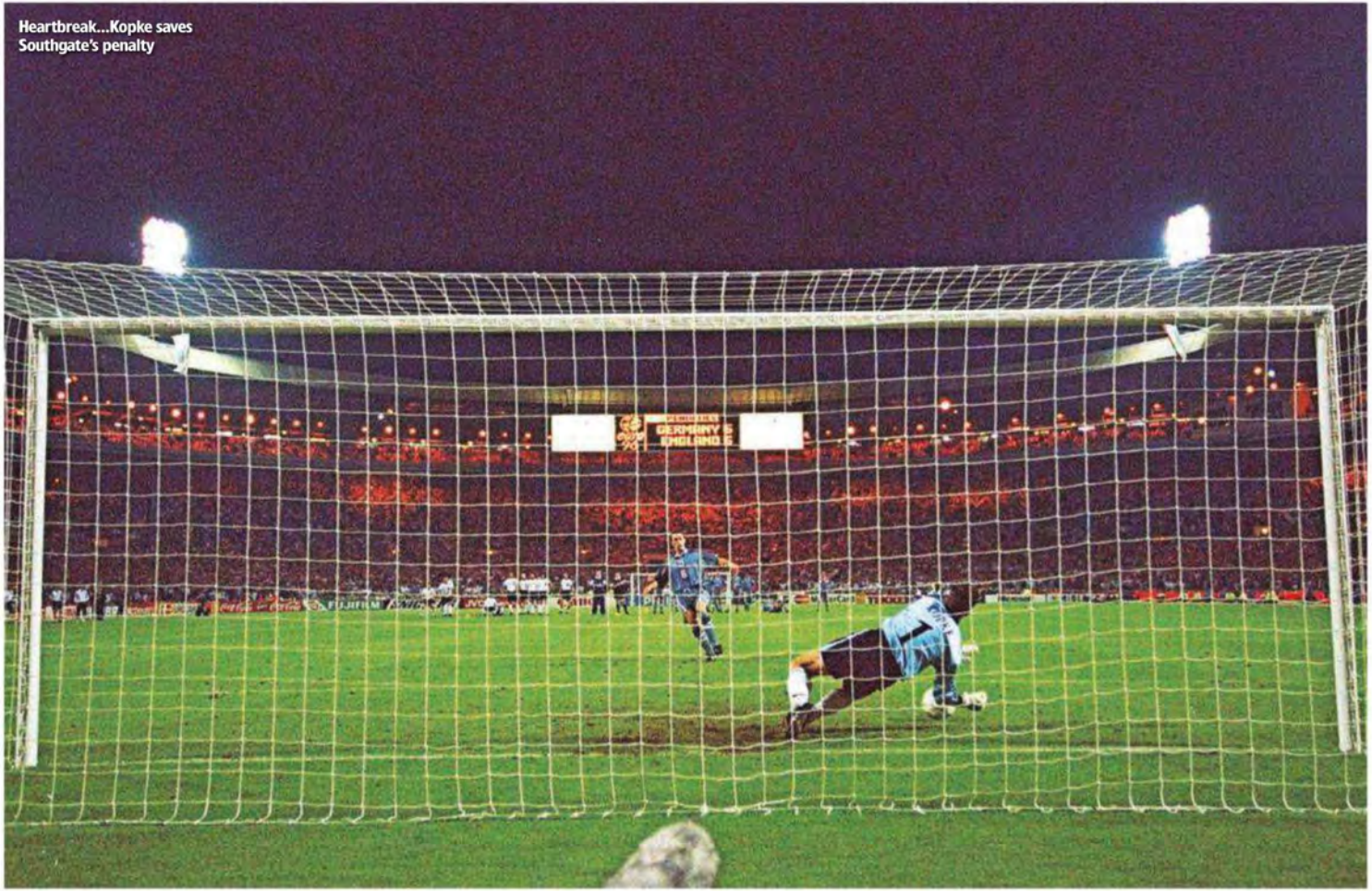
The knockout stages proved disappointing, with six of the nine matches ending in penalty shoot-outs.

In the quarter-finals, England and Spain drew at Wembley. Julio Salinas saw his goal incorrectly ruled offside for Spain before England won on spot-kicks.

Penalties were also needed to separate France and Holland after a goalless 120 minutes at Anfield. Clarence Seedorf missed the crucial penalty, leaving France skipper Laurent Blanc to convert his to set up a semi-final against the Czech

Czech winner...Poborsky

Gazzamania...Gascoigne celebrates his goal against Scotland



Heartbreak...Kopke saves Southgate's penalty

Republic, who had beaten Portugal with Karel Poborsky's lobbed goal.

The final quarter-final was the nastiest match of the tournament. Lenient refereeing allowed Croatia to kick Germany all over Old Trafford. Davor Suker scored a fine goal, but Germany survived the loss of Jurgen Klinsmann and Fredi Bobic through injury to score twice.

Lacklustre affair

The first semi-final was another lacklustre affair, with France and the Czech Republic both struggling to get a shot on target during 120 minutes before the Czechs won the shoot-out.

In the other semi, England took the lead at Wembley thanks to Alan Shearer, only for Germany to equalise through Stefan Kuntz. Gareth Southgate was the unfortunate England miscreant in the penalty shoot-out, sending a weak shot straight at Germany keeper Andy Kopke, leaving Andy Moller to fire home the winning penalty.

The Czechs almost sprang another surprise in the Final when Patrik Berger converted a second-half penalty. However, Germany substitute Oliver Bierhoff equalised after just four minutes on the pitch to take the match into extra time, where UEFA's new "golden goal" rule came into play as Bierhoff struck again.

FINALS TOURNAMENT

(played in England)

GROUP A

England - Switzerland 1-1
Holland - Scotland 0-0
Switzerland - Holland 0-2
Scotland - England 0-2
Scotland - Switzerland 1-0
Holland - England 1-4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Holland	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Scotland	3	1	1	1	1	2	4
Switzerland	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

GROUP B

Spain - Bulgaria 1-1
Romania - France 0-1
Bulgaria - Romania 1-0
France - Spain 1-1
France - Bulgaria 3-1
Romania - Spain 1-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Spain	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Bulgaria	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Romania	3	0	0	3	1	4	0

GROUP C

Germany - Czech Republic 2-0
Italy - Russia 2-1
Czech Republic - Italy 2-1
Russia - Germany 0-3
Russia - Czech Republic 3-3
Italy - Germany 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	3	2	1	0	5	0	7
Czech Republic	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Italy	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Russia	3	0	1	2	4	8	1

GROUP D

Denmark - Portugal 1-1
Turkey - Croatia 0-1
Portugal - Turkey 1-0
Denmark - Croatia 0-3
Croatia - Portugal 0-3
Denmark - Turkey 3-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Croatia	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Denmark	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Turkey	3	0	0	3	0	5	0

QUARTER-FINALS

England - Spain 0-0 Spain aet
England won 4-2 on pens
France - Holland 0-0 aet
France won 5-4 on pens
Germany - Croatia 2-1
Portugal - Czech Republic 0-1

SEMI-FINALS

France - Czech Republic 0-0 aet
Czech Republic won 6-5 on pens
England - Germany 1-1 aet
Germany won 6-5 on pens

FINAL
June 30 - London
Germany 2
(Bierhoff 73, 95)
Czech Republic 1
(Berger 59pen)
aet. Ref: Pairetto (Ita)
Att: 73,611

Triumph...Klinsmann

2000 Holland & Belgium

French finesse claims first joint-hosted finals

Off...Hagi (far left) is dismissed

The first co-hosted tournament had a number of logistical problems off the pitch but produced some of the best tournament football on it.

With UEFA's membership rising to 51, the qualifiers featured a record number of entrants, 49, and group winners qualified automatically for the tournament along with the best runners-up. The remaining runners-up took part in two-legged play-offs.

At the finals, Group A produced an upset, with traditional power Germany finishing bottom, behind England, with Portugal and Romania progressing to the quarter-finals.

Portugal, with Luis Figo in fine form, made their mark early on, coming from 2-0 down to beat England 3-2 in their opening game.

There was trouble from some fans in their next game, in Charleroi, but on the pitch Alan Shearer gave England their first tournament win over the Germans since 1966.

Portugal stormed through the group, beating Romania 1-0 and then thrashing Germany 3-0 with a reserve side in their final game.

England went out, after leading Romania 2-1 at half-time, when the Romanians snatched an 89th-minute winner through an Ioan Ganea penalty.

Co-hosts Belgium had opened the tournament with an impressive 2-1 victory over Sweden at the rebuilt Heysel stadium in Brussels, but they lost their following two games, both 2-0, to Italy and Turkey.

Italy topped the group, having begun with a fortunate 2-1 victory over Turkey, Filippo Inzaghi scoring the winner from a controversial penalty.

A solid win over Belgium, thanks to goals from Francesco Totti and Stefano Fiore, followed while their reserves beat Sweden with a late strike from Alessandro Del Piero.

Turkey joined Italy in the quarter-finals after beating Belgium in their final game, which saw Belgian keeper Filip De Wilde sent off.

Spain and Yugoslavia qualified from Group D, as expected, but the group threw up some remarkable results. Spain lost their opening game 1-0 to Norway, while 10-man Yugoslavia staged an astonishing recovery after going 3-0 down to Slovenia to draw 3-3.

Norway lost their next game, 1-0 to Yugoslavia, but after drawing 0-0 with Slovenia in their final game, they believed they had done enough to reach the last eight, as Spain were losing 3-2 to Yugoslavia. However, during four minutes of injury time, Spain equalised through Gaizka Mendieta, then took the lead through Alfonso Perez.

Group of death

Group D was dubbed the group of death, because it featured co-hosts Holland, world champions France, 1992 champions Denmark and 1996 runners-up Czech Republic. But results on the opening day set the tone for the rest of the group.

France, inspired by Zinedine Zidane and Thierry Henry, outclassed Denmark 3-0, while Holland edged past the Czechs 1-0

Outnumbered...Sweden's Kennet Andersson against Belgium

With both teams already through, Holland beat France 3-2 in their final game to top the group.

The quarter-finals all went to form,

Opener...Alfonso scores Spain's first against Yugoslavia

Waste...Italy keeper Francesco Toldo reacts after Holland's De Boer (right) misses his penalty

with all four of the matches settled in 90 minutes.

Striker Nuno Gomes was the star for Portugal as they overcame Turkey 2-0, while Italy beat Romania by the same scoreline – although the Romanians were angry at Gheorghe Hagi's second-half expulsion, a sad end to a glittering international career.

Holland thrashed Yugoslavia side 6-1 and France edged past Spain in an exciting encounter. Raul missed a last-minute penalty that would have made it 2-2.

In the semi-finals, France beat Portugal with a golden goal from Zidane, who scored a penalty in the 117th minute. The Portugal players were furious at the decision and surrounded referee's assistant Igor Sramka, who had spotted - correctly - a handball from Abel Xavier. Lengthy bans followed for Abel Xavier, Nuno Gomes and Paulo Bento.

In Amsterdam, Italy ground their way past Holland, winning on penalties after a 0-0 draw. Frank De Boer and Patrick Kluivert both missed spot-kicks in normal time and Italy had Gianluca Zambrotta sent off.

In the Final, Italy took the lead with a goal from Marco Delvecchio, but France equalised in the dying minutes through Sylvain Wiltord. Then, in extra time, substitute David Trezeguet struck the golden goal.

FINALS TOURNAMENT

(played in Belgium and Holland)

GROUP A

Germany - Romania 1-1
Portugal - England 3-2
Romania - Portugal 0-1
England - Germany 1-0
England - Romania 2-3
Portugal - Germany 3-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	3	3	0	0	7	2	9
Romania	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
England	3	1	0	2	5	6	3
Germany	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

GROUP B

Belgium - Sweden 2-1
Turkey - Italy 1-2
Italy - Belgium 2-0
Sweden - Turkey 0-0
Turkey - Belgium 2-0
Italy - Sweden 2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	3	3	0	0	6	2	9
Turkey	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
Belgium	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Sweden	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

GROUP C

Spain - Norway 0-1
Yugoslavia - Slovenia 3-3
Slovenia - Spain 1-2
Norway - Yugoslavia 0-1
Yugoslavia - Spain 3-4
Slovenia - Norway 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	2	0	1	6	5	6
Yugoslavia	3	1	1	1	7	7	4
Norway	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Slovenia	3	0	2	1	4	5	2

GROUP D

France - Denmark 3-0
Holland - Czech Republic 1-0
Czech Republic - France 1-2
Denmark - Holland 0-3
France - Holland 2-3
Denmark - Czech Republic 0-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	3	0	0	7	2	9
France	3	2	0	1	7	4	6
Czech Republic	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Denmark	3	0	0	3	0	8	0

QUARTER-FINALS

Portugal - Turkey 2-0
Italy - Romania 2-0
Holland - Yugoslavia 6-1
France - Spain 2-1

SEMI-FINALS

Portugal - France 1-2 aet
Italy - Holland 0-0 aet
Italy won 3-1 on pens

FINAL
July 2 - Rotterdam
France 2
(Wiltord 90, Trezeguet 103)
Italy 1
(Delvecchio 55)
aet. Ref: Frisk (Swe)
Att: 48,200

WORLD AND EURO CHAMPS

In 2000, France became the first reigning World Cup holders to win the European Championship.

Golden...France

2000 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

2004 Portugal

Hard-working Greeks upset the odds

Everyone's happy... Denmark (in red) and Sweden both go through

A record 50 teams took part in the qualifying tournament, with the 10 group winners joined in the finals by hosts Portugal and the winners of the five play-offs.

Spain and Holland surprisingly finished only second in their respective groups, but they came through the play-offs, beating Norway and Scotland respectively. Latvia beat Turkey to reach the finals for the first time, while Russia edged past Wales and Croatia saw off Slovenia.

Portugal had won the hosting rights ahead of bids from Spain and Austria-Hungary, but they opened the finals with a nervous defeat at the hands of Greece in Porto.

Nobody in their right mind could have predicted that the same two teams would be playing in the Final 22 days later.

Portugal got their campaign back on track by beating Russia 2-0 in Lisbon, with Deco, one of a number of changes, playing a crucial role.

Spain, meanwhile, were also struggling. Despite a confident start, beating Russia 1-0, they were held 1-1 by Greece in their second game after Raul missed an open goal late on. They needed a point from their final game against Portugal to reach the quarter-finals but substitute Nuno Gomes scored the only goal of the game for the hosts and Spain slunk home as yet another tournament ended in disappointment.

Instead, it was Greece, well marshalled by German coach Otto Rehhagel, who went through, despite losing their final game to Russia.

Weaknesses exposed

In Group B, England and France progressed as expected but exposed their weaknesses in the process. The English slipped up in their opening game, taking the lead against the French in Lisbon but then conceding an injury-time free-kick, from which Zinedine Zidane equalised, and then a penalty, which Zidane converted.

England then rolled past Switzerland and Croatia, with teenage Wayne Rooney in fine form, scoring four goals.

France, meanwhile, were very lucky to take a point from their meeting with Croatia and needed a late return to form by Thierry Henry to overcome Switzerland.

In Group C, Italy exited the tournament amid claims that Denmark and Sweden had contrived to draw their final game, ensuring the passage of both teams to the quarter-finals.

But the *Azzurri* only had themselves to blame. Francesco Totti was sent off for spitting at Christian Poulsen in the 0-0 draw with Denmark, while Zlatan Ibrahimovic's improvised backheeled equaliser for Sweden punished Italy for sitting back and defending a 1-0 lead.

They duly beat the Bulgarians, but only after Antonio Cassano's injury-time winner in Guimaraes, and it was not enough as the other game finished 2-2 in Porto, with Sweden twice coming from behind to level the scores.

The Swedes, courtesy of their 5-0 thrashing of Bulgaria in their opening game, finished top of the group on goal difference.

Czech Republic, winners of Group D, were the only team to win three matches in the group stage, despite going behind in all three of their games. The Czechs continued their unbeaten form from the qualifiers and were involved in the game of the

Equaliser...Zidane puts France level against England

Brave...Holland's Jaap Stam (in orange) challenges Milan Baros of the Czech Republic

Unimpressive...Germany's Michael Ballack fails to get the better of Latvia

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Out...Rooney is injured

Reflex...Holland keeper Edwin Van der Sar saves a penalty from Sweden's Olof Mellberg

tournament, when they recovered from 2-0 down to Holland in Aveiro to triumph 3-2. Holland coach Dick Advocaat was criticised for his substitution of winger Arjen Robben – not least by the player himself – with the scores at 2-1, and when Dutch defender Johnny Heitinga was sent off, the Czechs pressed home their advantage.

Germany were a disappointment, lacking firepower and even failing to beat debutants Latvia, who picked up their only point of the tournament in a 0-0 draw with the Germans in Porto.

The night's hero

Portugal gained momentum as the tournament continued. In their quarter-final game against England, a thrilling match was decided by penalties. David Beckham skied the opening kick for England and goalkeeper Ricardo became the night's hero, saving from Darius Vassell, who had been an early substitute for the injured Rooney, and then converting the winning penalty himself.

France's ageing team finally reached the end of the road when they were beaten by Greece – a side whose hard-running, tight-pressing game proved highly effective, and whose single goal from Angelos Charisteas was enough to take them into the semi-finals.

Holland, after defeats on penalties in three European Championships and a World Cup, finally ended their spot-kick jinx with victory over Sweden in Faro.

Czech Republic put Denmark to the sword with a 3-0 victory in Porto. Striker Milan Baros scored twice to continue a fine run of form.

Portugal finally realised the promise shown in their 1991 World Youth Cup triumph with a 2-1 victory over Holland in the semi-final. Captain Luis Figo was the outstanding performer on a night that Lisbon fans dared to dream of Final success.

However, Greece had other ideas. Their negative tactics came under fire but they proved highly effective in the semi-final, containing the Czech Republic over 90 minutes and then snatching a "silver goal" from Traionas Dellas' header from a corner seconds from the end of the first period of extra time.

In the Final, Greece employed similar tactics with a lone striker and heavy pressing to force Portuguese errors. The only goal of the game again came from a corner, Angelos Basinas swinging in a cross from the right and Charisteas rising to head past Ricardo and set the Greeks up for the most extraordinary upset ever seen at the European Championship.

Upset...Charisteas (white no9) scores Greece's winner against Portugal

YOUNG GUNS

Wayne Rooney became the youngest goalscorer ever in the finals when he struck against Switzerland. He held the record for four days before Johan Vonlanthen supplanted him.

SCOLARI AGAIN

Luiz Felipe Scolari guided Portugal to a quarter-final victory over England after beating the same opponents at the same stage with Brazil at the 2002 World Cup.

Despair...Figo

FINALS TOURNAMENT

(played in Portugal)

GROUP A

Portugal - Greece 1-2
Spain - Russia 1-0
Greece - Spain 1-1
Russia - Portugal 0-2
Spain - Portugal 0-1
Russia - Greece 2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Greece	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Spain	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Russia	3	1	0	2	2	4	3

GROUP B

Switzerland - Croatia 0-0
France - England 2-1
England - Switzerland 3-0
Croatia - France 2-2
Croatia - England 2-4
Switzerland - France 1-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	3	2	1	0	7	4	7
England	3	2	0	1	8	4	6
Croatia	3	0	2	1	4	6	2
Switzerland	3	0	1	2	1	6	1

GROUP C

Denmark - Italy 0-0
Sweden - Bulgaria 5-0
Bulgaria - Denmark 0-2
Italy - Sweden 1-1
Italy - Bulgaria 2-1
Denmark - Sweden 2-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden	3	1	2	0	8	3	5
Denmark	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Italy	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Bulgaria	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

GROUP D

Germany - Holland 1-1
Czech Republic - Latvia 2-1
Germany - Latvia 0-0
Holland - Czerch Republic 2-3
Holland - Latvia 3-0
Germany - Czech Republic 1-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Czech Republic	3	3	0	0	7	4	9
Holland	3	1	1	1	6	4	4
Germany	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Latvia	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

QUARTER-FINALS

Portugal - England 2-2 aet
Portugal won 6-5 on pens
France - Greece 0-1
Sweden - Holland 0-0 aet
Holland won 5-4 on pens
Czech Republic - Denmark 3-0

SEMI-FINALS

Portugal - Holland 2-1
Greece - Czech Republic 1-0 aet

FINAL
July 4 - Lisbon
Portugal 0
Greece 1
(Charisteas 57)
Ref: Merk (Ger)
Att: 62,865

QUICKEST GOAL

Dmitri Kirichenko's goal for Russia after 68 seconds against Greece is the fastest in history of tournament finals.

Underdogs...Greece

2004 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

2008 Austria & Switzerland

Spain end 44-year wait for title

Thrashed...Wesley Sneijder scores Holland's second goal against Italy

Spain, the perennial bridesmaids of the international game, finally claimed a title that their intelligent style of football deserved as they beat Germany in the Final of Euro 2008 in Vienna. Forty-four years on from their victory on home soil in 1964, they were champions of Europe once again.

Expanded qualifying groups featuring seven teams meant extra qualifying matches but with a more straightforward process: the top two from each group going straight to the finals.

England were the major absentees from the finals after they finished behind Russia and Croatia in their group, a disappointing outcome that prompted the dismissal of manager Steve McClaren.

At the finals, Portugal cruised through Group A, beating Turkey and the Czech Republic, and could even afford to play a reserve side in their final group game, which they lost to Switzerland. With the Swiss already heading out of the tournament after losing their first two matches, it was Turkey who took a surprise second place. At 2-0 down to the Czechs in their final group game, Fatih Terim's side looked to be out, but they staged an amazing recovery to win 3-2.

In Group B, Croatia won all three games, even beating favourites Germany, for whom Poland-born Lukas Podolski scored twice against the country of his birth.

Co-hosts Austria picked up a single point, in a 1-1 draw with Poland, thanks to referee Howard Webb's award of a controversial penalty in injury time. Going into their final group game, the Austrians had slim hopes of reaching the quarter-finals, but neighbours Germany put an end to their dreams.

Holland swept through Group C, thrashing world champions Italy 3-0 in their opening match and blitzing France 4-1 before their reserves beat Romania 2-0.

The well-organised Romanians held out for draws with Italy and France, but Italy squeezed through to the quarter-finals with a victory over a poor French side, who had Eric Abidal sent off midway through the first half.

Comfortable wins

Spain began Group D with a storming 4-1 victory over Russia, followed by comfortable wins over Sweden and Greece. Russia recovered from their opening loss to beat defending champions Greece and Sweden to claim second spot.

While the Germans had been lacklustre in the group stage, they got their act together in convincing fashion for the knockout stages, starting with a 3-2 victory over Portugal in the quarter-finals.

The meeting between Croatia and Turkey was heading for penalties but burst into life in the final minutes of extra time. Ivan Klasnic looked to have sealed Croatia's passage to the semi-finals with a header in the 119th minute but, in an astonishing recovery, Semih Senturk grabbed an equaliser for Turkey with the last kick of the game. Perhaps understandably,

Swamped...Turkey's Arda Turan is crowded out by Switzerland defender Patrick Muller (left) and goalkeeper Diego Benaglio

Last minute...Croatia keeper Stipe Pletikosa is beaten by Turkey's Semih (centre, in red)

Battle...Germany's Arne Friedrich (left) and Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal

Turkey had the upper hand in the penalty shoot-out. Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic shot wide and Mladen Petric saw his shot saved by Rustu Recber as Turkey went through.

Marco Van Basten's Holland team were favourites to beat Russia, who were coached by Dutchman Guus Hiddink, but a glittering performance from Andrei Arshavin put Holland in the shade.

Russia forced the Dutch onto the back foot, forcing them to chase the game for the first time in the tournament. Ruud Van Nistelrooy's goal took the game into extra time but Russia's physical reserves were deeper and Arshavin set up Dmitri Torbinski before scoring a brilliant individual goal himself.

Spain contained

In the other quarter-final, Italy were able to contain Spain but offered precious little in attack themselves and after 120 minutes the goalless game went to penalties.

Spain captain Iker Casillas was the hero in the shoot-out, saving from Daniele De Rossi and Antonio Di Natale before Cesc Fabregas despatched the winning kick.

Sub...Guiza

Joy...Russia celebrate their late goal against Holland

Turkey, after their series of comebacks, were hoping to emulate 2004 champions Greece in reaching the Final. A late Semih goal, which levelled the scores at 2-2 against Germany in the semi-final, looked like making that a strong possibility, but left-back Philipp Lahm popped up in the last minute with the goal that sent Germany into the Final.

Against Spain in the other semi, Russia were a shadow of the team that had outplayed Holland and Arshavin was anonymous.

A first-half substitution of the injured David Villa by Fabregas prompted Spain to play Xavi further forward and the Barcelona midfielder scored Spain's first goal. Sub Dani Guiza and David Silva added further goals to take Spain to the Final.

Against Germany in the Final, Spain's superior passing style prevailed, with Fernando Torres scoring the only goal of the game after 33 minutes of the first half.

Finish...Torres seals victory for Spain

DATE WITH DESTINY

Prior to beating Italy in the quarter-finals, Spain had lost penalty shoot-outs on three previous occasions – all of them occurring on June 22.

OLDEST SCORER

At 38 years and 257 days, Ivica Vastic became the oldest scorer at any European Championship finals when he converted a late penalty for Austria against Poland.

Veteran...Vastic

FINALS TOURNAMENT

(played in Austria and Switzerland)

GROUP A

Switzerland 0 Czech Republic 0-1
Portugal - Turkey 2-0
Czech Republic - Portugal 1-3
Switzerland - Turkey 1-2
Switzerland - Portugal 2-0
Turkey - Czech Republic 3-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Turkey	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Czech Rep	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Switzerland	3	1	0	2	3	3	3

GROUP B

Austria - Croatia 0-1
Germany - Poland 2-0
Croatia - Germany 2-1
Austria - Poland 1-1
Austria - Germany 0-1
Poland - Croatia 0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia	3	3	0	0	4	1	9
Germany	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Austria	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Poland	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

GROUP C

Romania - France 0-0
Holland - Italy 3-0
Italy - Romania 1-1
Holland - France 4-1
France - Italy 0-2
Holland - Romania 2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	3	0	0	9	1	9
Italy	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Romania	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
France	3	0	1	2	1	6	1

GROUP D

Spain - Russia 4-1
Greece - Sweden 0-2
Sweden - Spain 1-2
Greece - Russia 0-1
Greece - Spain 1-2
Russia - Sweden 2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	3	0	0	8	3	9
Russia	3	2	0	1	4	4	6
Sweden	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Greece	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

QUARTER-FINALS

Portugal - Germany 2-3
Croatia - Turkey 1-1 aet
Turkey won 3-1 on pens
Holland - Russia 1-3 aet
Spain - Italy 0-0 aet
Spain won 4-2 on pens

SEMI-FINALS

Germany - Turkey 3-2
Russia - Spain 0-3

FINAL

June 29 - Vienna
Germany 0
Spain 1
(Torres 33)
Ref: Rosetti (Ita)
Att: 51,428

UNDEFEATED CHAMPIONS

Spain were the first team since Germany in 1996 to win the tournament undefeated.

At last...Spain's wait is over

2008 FINAL: HOW THEY LINED UP

Brian Glanville's all-time European Championship XI

In soccer, as elsewhere, there are no absolutes, but I anticipate some surprise in the omission from my list of Michel Platini, and perhaps a little bewilderment at the inclusion of his compatriot Raymond Kopa.

Platini was beyond all doubt one of the finest players of his generation, but though France duly won the European title in 1984, Platini had disappointing games in the semi-final and Final despite what, I understand, was a brilliant beginning in the tournament. I saw those two last games, arriving from covering the England tour in South America.

Kopa, it is true, wasn't able to play in the 1960 finals and I hesitated before choosing him ahead of the Real Madrid winger, and later inside-right, Amancio, who was a Nations Cup winner in 1964 and a winner of the European Cup two years later.

Brian Glanville

Lev Yashin (USSR)
Goalkeeper

Superb in the first-ever finals tournament, in France in 1960, where he was crucial in the Soviets winning the title. Towering and black-jerseyed, he was the king of his own penalty box and had already shone in the 1956 Olympic tournament in Melbourne, which the USSR had won, and in the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. While his team profited from Spain's refusal to play them for political reasons in the quarter-finals, he kept Yugoslavia at bay in the Final and a goal by Viktor Ponedelnik gave the USSR victory in extra time.

Sergio Ramos (Spain)
Right-back

Solidly built with an adventurous line in overlapping, often to positive effect, Ramos was a salient figure not only in Spain's success in the 2008 European Championship, but also in their World Cup triumph in South Africa two years later. Though now so prominent with Real Madrid, who he joined on a buy-out clause in 2005, he is a product of Sevilla, where he was playing when he won his first international cap, versus China in March 2005, just days short of his 19th birthday.

Franz Beckenbaur (West Germany)
Sweeper

Arguably the inventor of "Total Football" as a mere teenager when, as a precocious member of the Bayern Munich team in his native city, he decided that what Giacinto Facchetti could do, attacking for Internazionale and Italy from left-back, he could do from behind the back line as an attacking sweeper. It would be years before Helmut Schoen allowed him to do as much for West Germany, but it was as sweeper, and captain that he had a splendid European Championship tournament in Belgium in 1972.

Carles Puyol (Spain)
Centre-back

Although short for a central defender, at 5ft 10in he still contrives to dominate for both his club, Barcelona, who he captains with authority, and his country, who he has represented since November 2000. Has competed in three World Cups and two European finals, and was a member of the team that won the Euro trophy in 2008. Quick, combative and an excellent positional player who is swift to see and defuse dangerous situations, he gained first-team status at Barcelona as a 21-year-old in 1999.

Paul Breitner (West Germany)
Left-back

An attacking full-back of speed and skill, and an expert taker of free-kicks, Breitner played a leading role in West Germany's victories in the 1972 European tournament and on home ground in the World Cup two years later. Ever an independent figure, he was – as a so-called Maoist – out of step with the Bavarians of his original club, Bayern Munich, even to the point of walking out of the post World Cup Final celebrations of 1974, announcing that he had no wish to be associated with a "*scheiss verein*" (crap team).

Raymond Kopa (France)
Outside-right

It may seem strange to choose Kopa, such an inspired deep-lying centre-forward, on the right wing, but this is actually where he began and where he won three successive European Cup finals with Real Madrid, in 1957, 1958 and 1959. A perfectly balanced, elusive, inventive player, and an exquisite passer of the ball – especially to Just Fontaine – he helped France qualify for the 1960 Euro finals but missed those himself. The son of a Polish miner, he was hurt in a mining accident before becoming a professional footballer.

Ruud Gullit (Holland)
Central midfield

One of the glorious Dutch trio, completed by Frank Rijkaard and Marco Van Basten, who enabled Holland to win their first major trophy, the European Championship of 1988 in Munich. Tall, powerfully built and infinitely versatile, Gullit could play in a variety of positions, combining strength with supreme technique, a devastating right foot and menace in the air. Fluent in several languages and famously unpredictable, he walked out of Holland's World Cup training camp in 1994.

Jovan Acimovic (Yugoslavia)
Central midfield

Technically adroit, shrewd in his use of the ball, an inside-left of quality and influence, Acimovic did much to get Yugoslavia to the Final of the 1968 tournament in Rome, England having been beaten in Florence in the semi-finals. In the first Final, Yugoslavia were manifestly cheated by a deeply suspect refereeing decision enabling Italy to draw. He also helped Yugoslavia reach the 1974 World Cup finals in West Germany where he played all six games for them before having to do his military service.

Dragan Dzajic (Yugoslavia)
Outside-left

A winger of great elegance and skill, he scored the goal which knocked out England in a bruising 1968 semi-final in Florence, although his own behaviour was always impeccable. Born in Belgrade, in May 1946, he made his debut for Red Star in June 1963 and scored in the 1968 first Final against Italy in Rome. In 1973 he broke a leg and then had to serve his conscription, but he came back to help Yugoslavia into the 1974 World Cup finals. Eventually found his way to the French league, playing for Bastia.

Marco Van Basten (Holland)
Striker

Will always be remembered for the stupendous right-foot volley with which he scored Holland's spectacular second goal against the USSR in the 1988 Final in Munich, having set up the first Dutch goal for Ruud Gullit. Bizarrely, Holland coach Rinus Michels hadn't started with him in the opening match, perhaps because Van Basten was known to be recovering from an ankle injury. But he then proceeded to destroy the England defence, scoring three goals, and to excel in the Final.

Gerd Muller (West Germany)
Striker

Alias "Der Bomber", a prolific centre-forward, he scored an astounding 68 goals in 62 appearances for his country, the last of them winning the 1974 World Cup Final, after which he retired from international football. Squat and powerful in the thighs, with a low centre of gravity, he would almost magically find space and time in and around the penalty box. He scored 10 goals for West Germany in the 1970 World Cup, two in the European Final in Brussels two years later, and the winner in the 1974 World Cup Final.

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